



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

B 1,036,170









21 21



6954

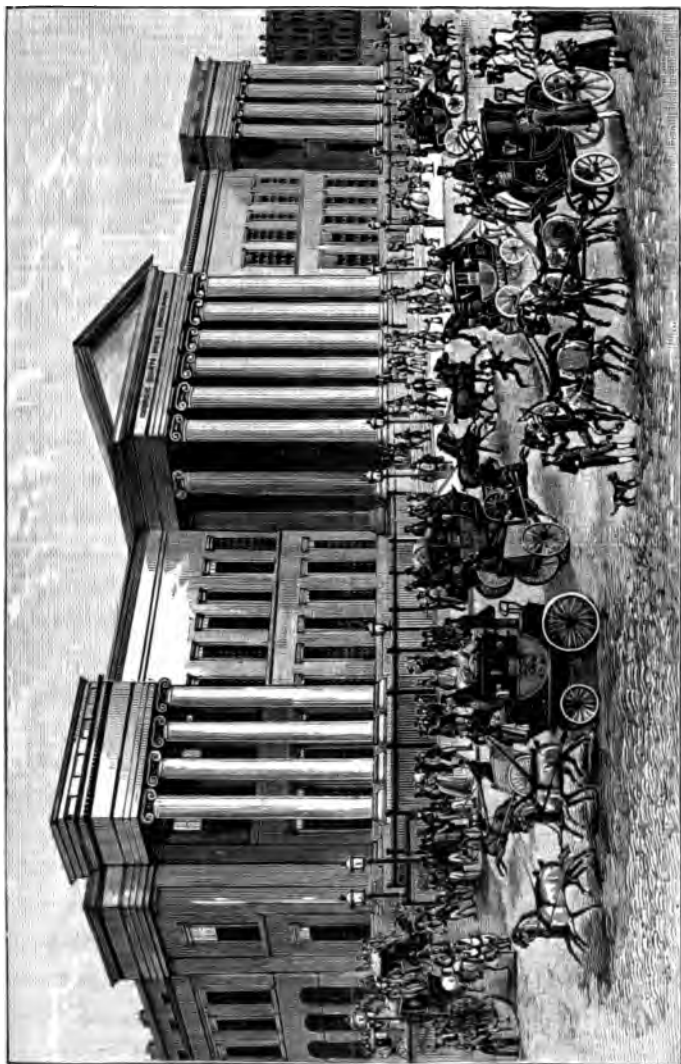
B1

A3.

FORTY YEARS AT THE POST-OFFICE

21/ 41/

L



THE GENERAL POST OFFICE, ST. MARTIN'S-LE-GRAND.
ABOUT 1830.

1. 100

2. 100

3. 100

4. 100

5. 100

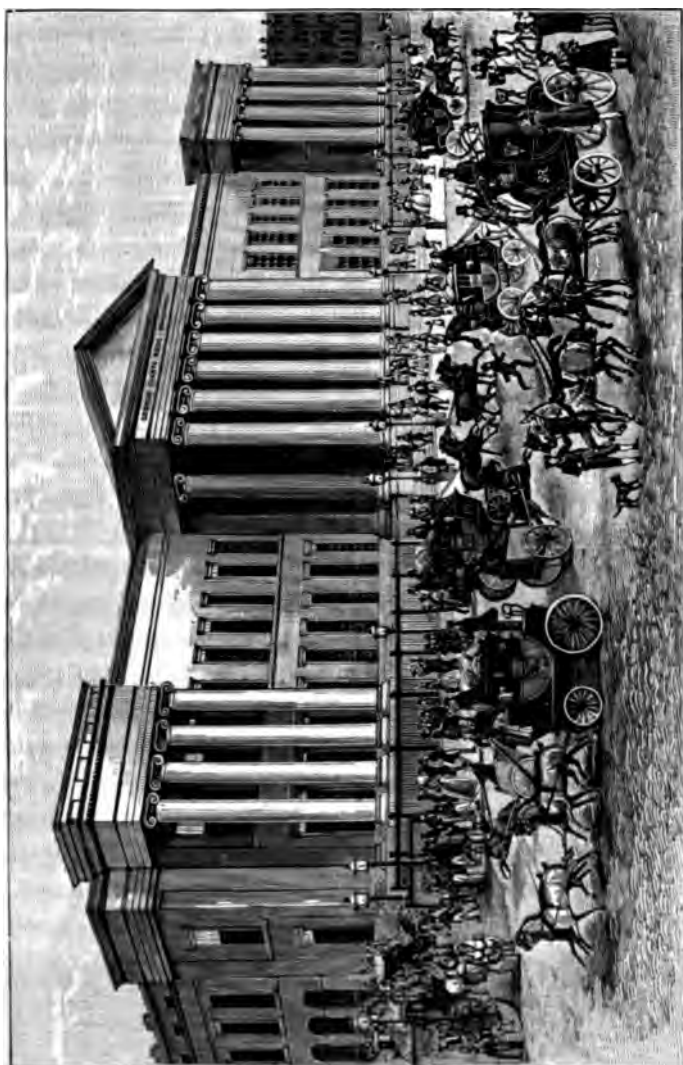
6. 100

7. 100

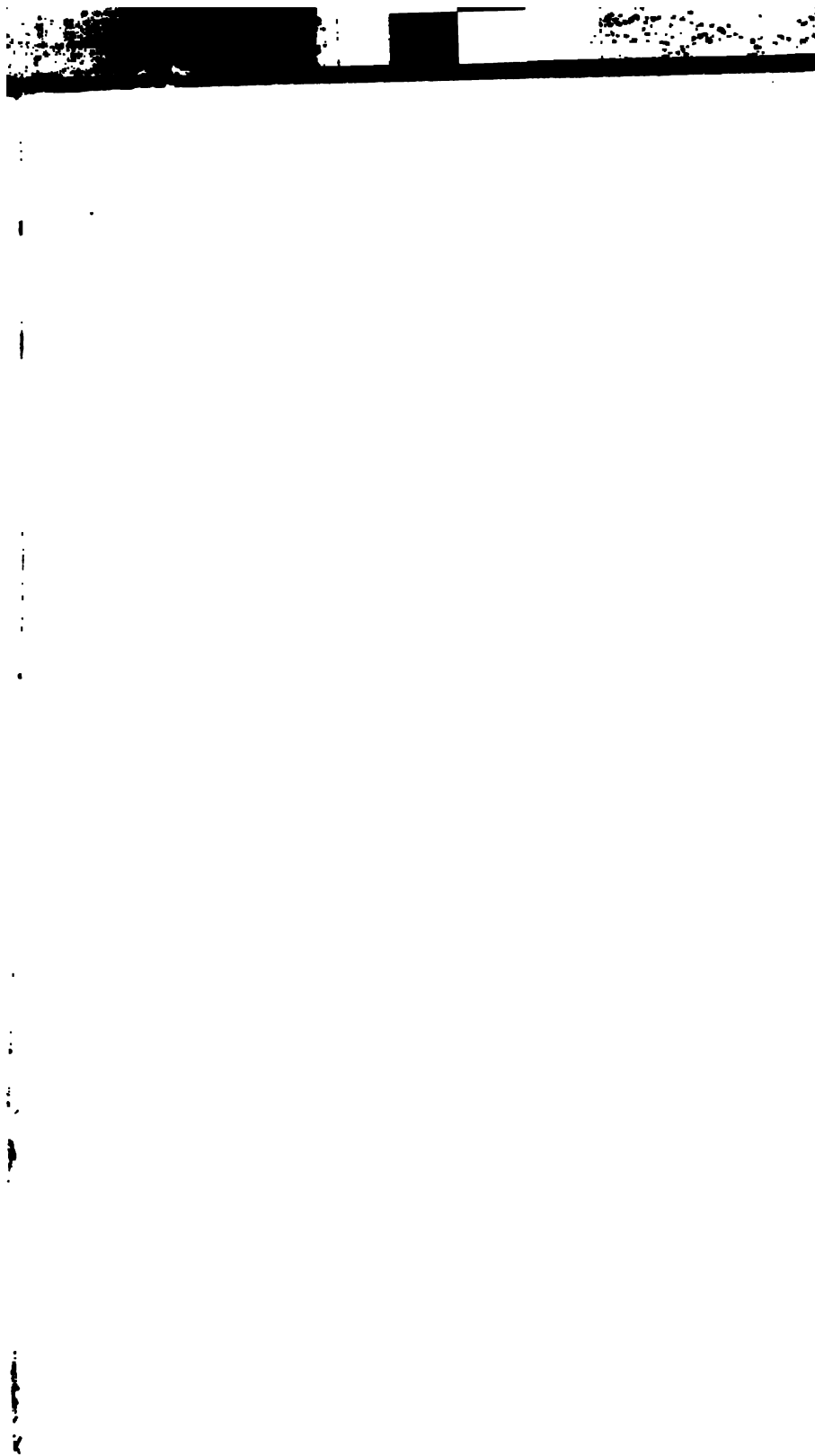
8. 100

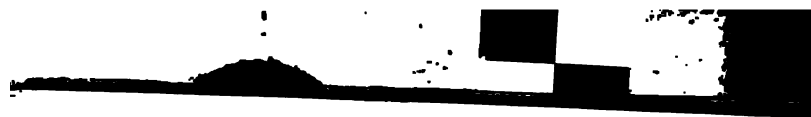
9. 100

10. 100



THE PEOPLE GOING OUT AT MARTIN'S P. GRANIN.





FORTY YEARS
AT 73017
THE POST-OFFICE

A PERSONAL NARRATIVE

Frederick E. Baines
F. E. BAINES, C.B.

SOMETIME SURVEYOR-GENERAL FOR TELEGRAPH BUSINESS, ASSISTANT
SECRETARY AND INSPECTOR-GENERAL OF MAILS



IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

LONDON
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON

Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen

1895

[All rights reserved]





P R E F A C E

THE preparation of these volumes has enabled me, while describing the inner life of a great department of State, to dwell on a subject very near to my heart—the claim of the Post-Office, by reason of the service which it renders, to the goodwill of its master, the Public.

The headquarters of this department lie too far east of Whitehall for its permanent officials to be closely in touch with the governing bodies of the realm, a condition which may have lent strength to the tendency noticeable, certainly when the century was younger, to rate the revenue-earning branches, and therefore this one, on a lower level than the spending branches of the State.

That such tendency may be some day—and with justice—corrected seems probable, because in recent years honours have been bestowed in St. Martin's-le-

Grand with no illiberal hand, and authoritative words in praise of the efforts of the department have been uttered with approval in the Council of the nation.

Statesmen of eminence have found in the Post-Office congenial responsibilities, a field for administrative capacity, and a training-ground for the highest political employment.

Viscount Canning and the Earl of Elgin went from St. Martin's-le-Grand to the Viceroyalty of India. The Duke of Argyll and the Marquis of Hartington became Secretaries of State.

The Post-Office is a carrier, a banker, and a telegraphist on the largest scale known. It controls more than 181,000 persons. Its receipts from postal and telegraph sources swell by 13 millions of pounds sterling the national collections, and add two and a half millions to the net income of the country.

These are respectable figures, which seem to imply that the men who are at the head of affairs have something substantial to think of.

Moreover, the Post-Office lives under the eye of the Public, and is in contact with it at numberless points. Hence, if by chance the vast machinery should become, however slightly, out of gear, the air would quickly be thick with complaint. That the atmosphere remains tolerably clear, leaves it to be inferred that

postal enterprise at St. Martin's-le-Grand is conducted with some degree of skill.

The organization of the department is probably not without interest for a part, at least, of the thirty or forty millions of human beings for whom it is continuously at work. In the hope of satisfying that interest, at least to a certain extent, I have sought to draw a true picture of the Inner Life of the Post-Office, its posts and its telegraphs, as seen in our time.

WEST CLIFF, BOURNEMOUTH,
October, 1894.





CONTENTS OF VOL. I.



PART I.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE GREAT NORTH ROAD - - -	1
II. THE WEST OF ENGLAND MAILS - - -	29
III. THE CELT AND THE GAEL - - -	60
IV. PENNY POSTAGE - - -	103
V. THE ELECTRIC TELEGRAPH - - -	142

PART II.

VI. ST. MARTIN'S-LE-GRAND - - -	163
VII. THE MODUS OPERANDI - - -	184
VIII. THE MINISTER - - -	210
IX. THE EXECUTIVE - - -	241
X. PILLARS OF THE LAW - - -	270

PART III.

XI. SCHEMES - - -	299
XII. FATHERS IN TELEGRAPHY - - -	318



LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

VOL. I.

ST. MARTIN'S-LE-GRAND IN 1836	-	-	<i>Frontispiece</i>
PORTRAIT OF SIR ARTHUR BLACKWOOD, K.C.B.	-	<i>To face</i>	<i>p. 178</i>
PORTRAIT OF THE RIGHT HON. HENRY FAWCETT	..		240
MAP OF MAIL-COACH ROADS IN THE REIGN OF			
WILLIAM IV.	-	-	<i>At end of Vol.</i>



.

.





FORTY YEARS AT THE POST-OFFICE

P A R T I.

CHAPTER I.—THE GREAT NORTH ROAD.

CHAPTER II.—THE WEST OF ENGLAND MAILS.

CHAPTER III.—THE CELT AND THE GAEL.

CHAPTER IV.—PENNY POSTAGE.

CHAPTER V.—THE ELECTRIC TELEGRAPH.



CHAPTER I.

THE GREAT NORTH ROAD.

THE story set out in these pages ought in strictness to begin in the year 1855, when I became a covenanted officer of the Post-Office, and so include thirty-eight years, or at most bring in two or three earlier years spent within its walls, from 1848 to 1851, thus raising the tale to forty-one. In 1848, however, it was not as a postal servant that employment was given to me at St. Martin's-le-Grand; the duties of an accredited official of the Electric Telegraph Company, in charge of a public telegraph office established in its midst, had brought me there.

But, in point of fact, a still earlier date than either must be the starting-point—one, indeed, as early as 1832, the year of my birth. For although a claim to a share in the doings of the Post-Office when William IV. was on the throne, and the Duke of Richmond his Postmaster-General, would be one not easy for me to make out, still, between 1832 and 1855 much happened to influence the fortunes of the

department in after-years, which it seems proper to notice.

The year of my birth is mentioned because that fixes the date when the mail-coaches approached the heyday of their prosperity; and my birthplace—the pleasant old market-town of Chipping Barnet—because the Great North Road was the most famous of all the old mail-coach roads, and Barnet probably the best known of the coaching towns upon it.

My native town, as all are aware who own polled cattle, or who, about the month of September, have horses to buy or sell, is planted 11 miles from London, high up on a breezy plateau, on the border of Hertfordshire. Through it, of necessity, passed in the coaching days the bulk of the traffic between the Metropolis and the midland counties, Scotland and Ireland. Other highways, it is true, were available—on the east by way of Waltham Cross, and on the west through Aylesbury and Banbury—along which much Northern traffic could be conducted.

For instance, two mail-coaches left St. Martin's-le-Grand every night for Scotland. As they were driven out of the yard, one was turned to the right hand, and made for the Peacock at Islington, for Barnet and Biggleswade; the other bore round to the left into Cheapside, and shaped its course for the Flower-pot in Bishopsgate Street, for Hoddesdon and Royston. These two roads through eastern Herts are never more than 12 or 15 miles apart. They unite at

Alconbury Hill, 65 miles from the Post-Office. There were, of course, many fine mail-roads out of London—the Bath road especially—still, the Great North Road, when the combined efforts of Telford and Macadam had rendered it a magnificent highway, for smoothness, easy gradients, and bustle surpassed them all.

Barnet is the junction-point of the two main branches of this ancient highway. Until the early thirties the Great North Road held its course undivided a little to the northward of the town, as far, that is, as Barnet Pillar or Hadley High Stone—a column erected by Sir Jeremy Sambrooke, in 1740, to commemorate the battle fought on Easter Day, 1477, between Edward IV. and Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick. It is there the road divides. Its eastern branch runs through Potter's Bar straight for Hatfield, Stamford, Leeds, and York; the western makes for South Mims, St. Albans, Birmingham, Liverpool, and Holyhead. For the acceleration of the Liverpool and Irish traffic, this western branch was shortened in the twenties by means of a new cut from the north-western edge of Barnet town to South Mims. An old inhabitant tells me he recollects the road being made through fields at Hadley, in 1820, so abridging the distance, and avoiding the perilous angles and declivities of Kitt's End and Dancer's Hill, and the floods and miry ways of Mims Wash. But in any case the traveller would have to traverse Barnet. There he would get fresh horses, his morning 'beaver,'

his snack by the way, his night's lodging, or a lift in the accommodation van. Thus, vehicular traffic of all kinds, and wayfarers in shoals, crowded in those days the Great North Road.

The lumbering wain, the smart swift, four-horse mail, the long stage-coach crammed with passengers, the market-carts from Sandy and Potton, the meteor-like post-chaise, or the travelling-carriage, with emblazoned panels and spacious rumble, drawn by four horses (two postilions in blue or yellow jackets riding the near-side horses), the modest chaise drawn by the less imposing pair; the ostlers shouting, horns blowing, yard-bells ringing, the bleating of flocks, the lowing of herds, the squeal of a pig, the drovers' cries, and, at night, flashes from the mail-coach lamps—such was the busy life of Chipping Barnet in the thirties, when the mail followed the road.

Almost every second house in the town had some design, in the way of business, of course, on the traveller's purse: inns by the score, saddlers, harness-makers, farriers, wheelwrights, smiths, corn-dealers—every conceivable craft, in short, which could be associated with the work of the road. Even the cage stood handy to the highway, for the easier incarceration of evil-doers; and though the stocks were, perforce, relegated to a less conspicuous position, still, it was close to the main-road, on a gravelly waste, that we found it convenient to pitch them. There they are still.

Gone, however, by 1882 were the stage-waggons,

whose wheels had felloes of 16 inches width, and whose weight, when fully loaded, was 8 tons. Gone, too, was the gross overcrowding of the stage-coaches. No longer were to be seen ten passengers on the roof, three on the box, four on the gamon-board, and six on the dicky, besides the coachman and conductor—instead of six passengers only, as the law directed. The Post-Office, however, kept within the legal limit, as might be expected, and strictly watched the mail-coach bookings.

No point was lost sight of. Even the highwayman flourished, though at a period long anterior to the thirties, and the glamour of Dick Turpin still hung—in fact, still hangs—about the locality. So much for the traffic of the old trunk road, of which the mail-coach was the most picturesque feature.

Once upon a time we even burnt a heretic in our market-place; but that stupendous event, it is right frankly to own, had nothing to do with the nineteenth century or his Majesty's mails. Still, the record lifts us out of the commonplace—and that must be my excuse for preserving it.

One more relic of the pre-Macadamite age: In 1810, all the mail-bags for the line of road from Hatfield to Boston were stolen from the mail-coach at Barnet while the horses were being changed. It is so long ago that the feat begins to acquire the respectability of age. It may be in part due to these exploits that Sir Stamford Raffles, when he came to live near us, expressed himself in terms

less complimentary than frank about his Hertfordshire neighbours. We are, however, model people now.

In those spirited books, 'Old Coaching Days' and the 'Coaching Age,'* written by my fellow-townsmen, Mr. Stanley Harris—no mean wielder of the whip behind a four-horse team, by the way—are printed facsimiles of time-bills which my predecessors in the office of Inspector-General of Mails issued while mail-coaches were in their glory. Those of to-day are modelled on lines nearly identical with the old ones—quite the same when they apply to coaches, almost the same where trains come in question. They are essential to close supervision. 'What finer spectacle could be viewed than the despatch of the mail-coaches from the General Post Office?' asks Mr. Harris in a burst of just enthusiasm. What, indeed? Or what more stirring than the procession of her Majesty's mail-coaches on May 17, 1838 (the last one of the old coaching times, by the way), when twenty-five coaches assembled in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and, with a horseman between each coach, paraded the West End, and returned through the north gate of the Post-Office yard? From the same north gate a similar procession of parcel-coaches emerged in the summer of 1887. It paraded Cheapside and the Victoria Park, to the delight of many thousands of spectators.

Although mail-coaches were the chief feature of the

* Richard Bentley and Son, 1882.

mail-road, and usually the swiftest conveyances, they were not always so—at least not in England and Wales. Twenty-eight mail-coaches were despatched from London every night; one record says twenty-nine, but it included either the Dover or the Harwich foreign mail coach. Both started at unusual hours, and were hardly orthodox mail-coaches at all. On the Great North Road alone there were no fewer than fifty or sixty coaches of all sorts, and the double trips resulted in a coach passing, in one direction or the other, every ten or fifteen minutes through the town of Barnet.

Unlike the practice which obtains in the nineties, when almost every railway-train is available for the conveyance of a mail-bag, little or no use was made for postal purposes of ordinary stage-coaches. So at Glasgow, for example, there were only two mails a day to Edinburgh, but there were coaches every two or three hours; coaches ran every hour to Paisley, but only three posts a day.

In fact, so late as 1836 the only instance in Great Britain and Ireland in which a bag of letters was forwarded under the sanction of the Post-Office by a stage-coach was a bye-bag conveyed by the Amity coach between Stamford and Cottersworth, a distance of 14 miles.

We had the Birmingham mails (one coach, however, ran by Aylesbury), and the Chester, the Holyhead and the Manchester mails. The Manchester mail-coach proper ran by way of Derby, accomplish-

ing 187 miles in $20\frac{1}{4}$ hours, although later performances beat this by an hour and a quarter.

There were also the Hull mail, the Carlisle mail by Grantham, and the Leeds mail going through Melton Mowbray and Nottingham.

I give the time-table of the Liverpool mail-coach, which is historic in being the first long coach to be really hit by railways. In point of fact, after July 5, 1835, there were two coaches—the mail proper, which ran by way of Barnet and Knutsford, through the Potteries; and the Chester coach, which was prolonged to Woodside Ferry and there crossed the Mersey. The former coach left London at the usual hour of 8 p.m. It was due in Liverpool next day at 4.50 p.m.—203 miles in 20 hours 50 minutes; speed, including stoppages, whether for changes or meals, 9 miles 5 furlongs per hour. On the up journey it left at 10.30 p.m., and was in London at 9.30 p.m.—23 hours, or only 8 miles 6 furlongs per hour.

The Woodside coach, although a night mail down, running at 9 miles 1 furlong an hour, and arriving at 6.19 p.m., was a day mail up, starting from Liverpool at 8.15 a.m., and reaching London at 6.32 a.m. If all stoppages were deducted, the actual speed of this coach was $9\frac{3}{4}$ miles an hour.

What does Bradshaw now show? The 10 p.m. mail-train from Euston is due at Liverpool at 3 in the morning—5 hours on the road instead of 20, or even 23; 40 miles an hour instead of less than 10.

Soon after nine o'clock at night, Barnet Hill was ablaze with the lamps of the down night mails. The distance from the General Post-Office to the Barnet Post-Office is computed at 11 miles and 2 furlongs. For this run, in the time-bill of the London and Carlisle mail-coach in 1836, when the latest accelerations had been effected, only an hour and eighteen minutes were allowed. A 'spanking trot' indeed this must have involved; and the busy officials who looked after the coaches of the past—Charles Johnson, George Louis, and George Stow, Surveyors and Superintendents—must have had their wits about them to keep the mails to time. Where would they have been, however, but for Telford, who improved the gradients of the Great North Road and straightened it, and Macadam from America, who made its surface smooth and solid?

This same mail-coach left St. Martin's-le-Grand at the usual hour of 8 p.m. On passing Barnet it took the Hatfield Road, leaving Hadley Highstone on the left hand. It was at Grantham next day in time for breakfast; at Wetherby, where there was a stop from 4.36 to 5.11 p.m., for dinner. There the passengers prepared for the final and most trying run to the border town.

The coach had given Leeds, its old halting-place, the 'go-by'; it called at Catterick or Greta Bridge (putting down Smike and Mr. Squeers for Dotheboys Hall, in time for stir-about and bed), and then, striking off to the westward, made for Brough,

Appleby and Penrith, a cold, long ride at the best of times. In due course they passed through Hesketh, and, hungry and worn out (saving by a deviation and quicker running 8 miles and 1 hour and 24 minutes), won into merry Carlisle before the earliest milkman was astir, at 48 minutes to 5 in the morning. So in 32 hours and 17 minutes the 'Flying Cumbrian' covered 302 miles and 7 furlongs, which means an average running speed, up hill and down dale, of, say, $9\frac{1}{2}$ miles in the hour, including stoppages. In half an hour the coach for Glasgow started, this one rattling along at $10\frac{1}{2}$ miles an hour.

The Holyhead mail-coach, which also ran through Barnet, and is acknowledged to have been one of the swiftest mails out of London, took the north-western road, leaving Hadley Highstone on the right hand, if it went by Kitt's (or Kickes') End and Dancer's Hill, or, as it did when Telford's work was done, along the New Road, straight for South Mims. That coach got over the ground at the rate of 10·1 miles per hour, and accomplished the journey of 259 miles (one measurement gives 261), by way of Birmingham, Shrewsbury, and Capel Curig, in 26 hours 55 minutes. Now the mail, still leaving the Post-Office at 8 p.m., reaches Holyhead pier at 2.35 a.m., or in 6 hours and 35 minutes from London. The time-bill of this mail-train (at least, for the up journey) is the very last print issued under my signature.

From Barnet to Hatfield, through Potters Bar, the Carlisle mail had a splendid run, with scarcely a hill

to breast; the roads, too, through eastern Hertfordshire being then, as they still are, almost perfect. But from London along the Holyhead road, before Telford's time—alas for suffering horseflesh! The ill-made track under Highgate archway; the long pull up Barnet Hill—worse before a new slope was made than even now; the sudden dip by Wrotham Park; the abrupt angularities of the road beyond; the loose surface in dry weather of the gradient sinking to the Wash; and then the gruesome tug up Ridge Hill itself!

It was better running when Telford and Macadam's engineering work was completed; and those who have the curiosity to see what this notable mail road actually was before they took it in hand should forthwith repair to South Mims village. Northwards, beyond the White Hart, they will find to the west of the new road a bit of the old one, which will occasion not a little astonishment.

It is a singular fact that both these famous men, Macadam and Telford, were born within a year of each other (the former in 1756, and the latter in 1757), and died in the fulness of their labours almost at the same time, Telford—the younger man, first, at the age of seventy-seven, in 1834; and Macadam, at eighty, in 1836.

Macadam received £10,000 from national funds in acknowledgment of his services, Telford's reward being profitable employment on great works and a world-wide reputation.

Contrasts between the rate of travelling in the olden time, when the mail-coach itself was deemed to outstrip the wind, and the swift transits of the present day have not yet lost all novelty. Here are two within my own experience.

Once, on the platform at the railway-station of Stockton-on-Tees, about 1875, while waiting for the 10.43 a.m. train for York and London, the conversation of a young lady and an elderly gentleman met my ear. 'Papa, is not this quite a slow train? We do not get to London until six o'clock; we shall be more than seven hours on the journey—just think!' 'My dear,' replied the sagacious elder, 'be content; the last time I went from Stockton to London I was thirty-seven hours about it!'

Not long ago it was remarked in a journey on the Midland line from Derby to Leicester, 'How we crawl along!' As a fact, the train had left Derby at 1.35, and was then running into Leicester at 2.12; so that the apparently slow travelling was in reality a flight through the air at a velocity of nearly 49 miles an hour. The hypercriticism, as may be supposed, was the most genuine compliment which could be paid to the solidity of the rolling stock, and the sound and even condition of the permanent way of the Midland route.

A feature of mail-coach work was the monstrous size of the official way-bill, as it was styled in coaching language, or time-bill, as the department for sixty years has since preferred to describe it. In

these days the time-bill of, say, the London and Carlisle Railway night mail is printed on a sheet of foolscap 13 inches by 8; but the noble document entrusted to the guard of the Edinburgh mail in 1836 measured just 2 feet 6 inches by 11 inches. Moreover, it was a double sheet, the 'down' bill forming one leaf, and the 'up' bill the other. Now the two bills are printed back to back.

It passes comprehension how the guard managed to keep his bill tidy and entire. For in the most stringent terms he was enjoined by his instructions to see that the time-bill is 'justly dated and signed at every place.' There was no opening for a private note-book for hasty pencillings and for filling up the time-bill in peace at the journey's end. 'He is to be very careful of the time-bill,' ran George Louis's orders; 'and if torn or lost is to give immediate notice.'

The average weight of mail carried by coach out of London ranged from 345½ lb. to 463 lb. A mail-coach could, if needful, carry 1,680 lb. of mail matter, so that on most mail-coaches there was a good margin for growth of the post. One or two were, however, overloaded.

In my boyhood there was a regular weekly posting at Barnet on Sunday of newspapers, brought from London by a special cart. The explanation is that no private individual was permitted to send postal packets by the mail-coaches on Sunday from London. The publishers of London Sunday newspapers, there-

fore, had recourse to the first post-town out of London, on the several coach roads, to send copies by post to provincial subscribers. On a Sunday in August, 1835, newspapers were accordingly posted as follows : Barnet, 460 ; Hounslow, 317 ; Croydon, 11 ; Romford, 91 ; Waltham Cross, 315.

When, after 1838, the road traffic declined, there were not wanting attempts, abortive as they proved to be, to beat the four-horse coach by steam, even on its own ground. About the period of the Bedford Times being taken off the Hatfield road, consequent, it may be supposed, on the opening of the branch railway from Bletchley to Bedford, several efforts of the kind were made. Great, I recollect, was the astonishment of the Barnet townsfolk one autumn evening at hearing resonant snorts and puffs in the High Street, wherein there appeared, carrying passengers, a vast machine on four wheels, urged by a portable furnace, and furnished with a boiler which emitted clouds of vapour.

This was a steam carriage, which had worked its way by road from London. It already hung out many signals of distress. Tools were borrowed to repair damages. An ingenious man named Blencowe (who afterwards submitted a plan to Government for destroying the wreck of the *Royal George*, and for confounding the Queen's enemies by explosives, on probably the torpedo principle) volunteered his services, and the machine was patched up to enable it to start on the return journey. But Prickler's Hill

sorely tried a shattered constitution; and Brown's Wells, near Turpin's Oak, on Finchley Common, must have given the steam-coach its *quietus*, for the Great North Road saw it no more.

The Manchester and Liverpool coaches, those on the Birmingham, Chester, and Holyhead roads, were naturally among the first to feel the strain of railway extension; although in 'An Old Coachman's Chatter'* it is recorded that the Wonder, which ran between London and Shrewsbury, only ceased to cover the journey throughout when the forties had well begun.

The Bedford Times was the last four-horse coach to come off the Great North Road. It carried—what no other coach to the best of my recollection did—a time-piece on the near-side of the box-seat, and so gave true time down the road. Between forty and fifty years later it fell to me, as Inspector-General of Mails—and it was one of my latest acts of office—to revive in part coach-life on the York road by arranging the trial trip of the Royal Parcel Mail-coach which now runs from London to Bedford.

Our two chief hotels were the Red Lion, under Mr. Charles Bryant, and the Green Man, kept by Messrs. Newman and Buckle. The former hotel found me beneath its roof for the night in the spring of 1892. The morrow was the day of Harpenden races. The bustle of the road of boyish days revived,

* Richard Bentley and Son, 1891.



and something like the coach traffic of childish recollections crowded once more the Great North Road. Fours-in-hand dashed up to the Lion and to the Old Salisbury Arms; but the days of the Green Man had long since been numbered, and the vast stable-yard rang no more with the cry for 'Two pair to St. Albans, and look sharp!'

The Duke of Beaufort states in the Badminton Series that he has seen in places—notably at Barnet, amongst others—four horses turn out, say, from the Red Lion, on a carriage coming in sight from London (they could see nearly a mile southward from the Lion door), to tempt the travellers to change there. Sometimes they would do so; at others, writes the Duke, they galloped by to the Green Man, and the Red Lion horses turned in again.

As to the Green Man, it is on record* that on the occasion of a great prize fight in Hertfordshire, between Gully and Gregson, the amount received at the hotel on May 9, 10, and 11, 1808, was as follows:

			£	s.	d.
For posting (187 pairs) ...	...	...	141	17	10½
Bills in the house ...	...	...	54	19	0
Bills in the yard... ..	...	...	14	10	0
			£211	6	10½

Even before railways came into vigorous life, the position of the trustees of the mail roads had become critical. With all the toll-paying traffic which passed over them, the roads did not clear their full

* 'Old Barnet' (Stevens).

cost. In the 11 miles between my native town and London there were, to the best of my recollection, turnpike gates across the road at Whetstone, at Highgate, south of the Archway (where, though on foot, I used to pay toll), at Islington, and in the City Road. So the road-traffic was caught at every point. Yet the trustees' finances were in a deplorable state. There were in 1838 more than 1,100 separate turnpike trusts. The trustees owed £8,500,000. Their income was upwards of £1,750,000, and their current expenditure left, it is true, a margin of £600,000. But, then, interest at the rate of $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. had to be paid on their debts, and probably money put by as a sinking fund for redemption of capital. Hence they were in a bad way. Interest was £1,000,000 in arrear.

But a Post-Office servant ought to be chary of criticising highroad management, seeing that his department claimed the right to send the Queen's mails along the Queen's highway toll free, and so brought no grist to the trustees' mill.

We who are Barnet-born cling fondly to the legend that from a bedroom window of our post-office was thrown out by the postmaster's wife to the night mail-coach, in mistake for the London letter-bag, the leathern small-clothes of the worthy postmaster. They were carried on to Highgate, says a local historian (Mr. S. Byford), who adopts the anecdote, and then brought back by the guard. But many small towns—Dunbeath, in Caithness, amongst them—

claim the small-clothes story, which is one that men's minds could swiftly grasp and husbands appreciate even sixty years ago.

In 1840 our solitary postwoman, Mrs. Child, was a cherry-cheeked bright old lady, apparently none the worse for her two-score years of postal trudges. She began her work when George III. had been forty years upon the throne, and it was well into Victoria's reign before she laid down her staff, ended her useful round of faithful labour, and ceased to draw her regulation pay.

Concerning this good soul a story is told which may bear repetition. A friend from a distance visited, early in the century, Mr. Hopewell, the grocer. He was much impressed at finding that the post-letters were delivered by a woman (Mrs. Child), whose constant cry on her rounds was: 'Letter—fou'pence!' meaning, of course, a letter for delivery, fourpence postage to pay. The friend went to Australia, spent nearly forty years in the colonies, returned at last, again visited his friend, and the first sound which saluted him on rising in the morning was the same cry from the same postwoman: 'Letter—fou'pence!'

We have had at Barnet some admirable postmen, untiring and loyal servants of the State, who worked hard for very little money, and made the public interests their own. The son of one of these worthy men rose to distinction in the department, and became postmaster of the great

chartered town, 900 years old, of Wolverhampton. It is not easy, by the way, to find an example more striking of prosperity, measured by the postal test, advancing by the now proverbial 'leaps and bounds' than is afforded by the said town of Wolverhampton. So recently as the year before I joined the Post-Office—*i.e.*, in 1854—one person sufficed to deliver its letters; now fifty-six postmen are employed on the town services alone, and almost as many telegraph messengers in delivering telegrams; so that the force for distributing postal packets in Wolverhampton has in forty years increased a hundredfold.

What was Mrs. Child's pay is uncertain. But the scale of remuneration for the rural foot posts of the locality was frugal in the extreme. The post to South Mims, 3 miles off, cost no more than £4 9s. 3d. a year, while that to Shenley, 4 miles off or a little more, cost £6 19s. 0d. On Hadley, the beautiful village which adjoins Barnet, money was spent with a lavish hand, the outlay being no less than £7 7s. 4d. a year, but for this sum no doubt two deliveries were exacted. From Barnet Post-Office to Hadley Church is a mile; the whole round of the village, to Hadley Hurst, the Mount, and the Highstone and back, would not be less than 3 miles, perhaps 4—but say for the double journey 7 single miles. The handsome allowance of £7 7s. 4d. a year, or less than 3s. a week, would yield to the postman, even assuming that one day in seven was a

blank day (which is assuming a good deal), pay at the rate of less than a penny for each mile walked. Now, the weekly walk of a rural postman, including a Sunday in turn, is on the average 94 single miles. His wages, counting the value of clothing, medical attendance, and Sunday pay, range from £1 to 22s. a week. Stripe pay raises the maximum to 25s. a week, which amount (although wages are now calculated rather by time than distance) is equal to 3d. for each mile walked by the postman—or threefold the pay of the thirties.

In the same way that distances of towns from London by railway are not measured from one central spot but from the respective termini, so the measurement of the highroads in the coaching days was determined by a starting-point selected, sometimes in the City of London, at others on its outskirts.

When the General Post-Office was situated in Lombard Street, distances calculated from the Standard in Cornhill were practically the same as if reckoned from the Post-Office itself; and when, in 1829, the new building in St. Martin's-le-Grand was occupied and Hicks' or Hicke's Hall was the measuring-point for the Barnet road, the reputed distances from London were only about 3 furlongs short of the true distance from the Post-Office. The place where Hicke's Hall formerly stood can still be identified. In the wall of a tavern in Peter's Lane, at the corner of St. John's Street and St. John's Lane, in West Smith-

field, a tablet is fixed at about 20 feet from the ground. It bears the following inscription :

‘OPPOSITE THIS PLACE HICKE’S HALL
FORMERLY STOOD,
1 MILE 1 FURLONG AND 13 YARDS FROM
THE STANDARD IN CORNHILL,
4 FURLONGS 205 YARDS FROM HOLBORN
BARRS DOWN HOLBORN, UP SNOW HILL,
COW LANE, AND THROUGH SMITHFIELD.’

Oddly enough, Paterson, in his ‘Roads,’ which book is an authority of great value, makes no mention of the famous Standard in Cornhill, although he does mention the Obelisk in Fleet Street, the Stones’ End in the Borough, Tyburn Gate, and other ancient land-marks or boundaries. His measurements are made from London and Westminster Bridges, the Stones’ End, Tyburn Turnpike, Hyde Park Corner, Hicke’s Hall, and Shoreditch and Whitechapel Churches.

The Post-Office, of course, paid for the mail-coaches a mileage reckoned from the Post-Office door, but the distance traversed continually changed because of local improvements. For instance, even as late as 1838, it was 46 miles from Taunton to Bristol; it is now 44 miles.

In 1837 the distance run in England and Scotland was 6,648,217 miles. This was 404,739 miles more than in the year previous, and 732,211 more than in 1833. So it is clear that up to the end of 1836, at any rate, the mileage was a rapidly increasing quantity.

In 1837, mail-coaches, mail-guards, and other items of expense in connection, cost £107,122; tolls paid on the mail-coaches absorbed £33,863 more, so the grand total for the year was £140,985. I must admit that the last item is not easy to explain, as mail-coaches were exempt from tolls. Perhaps in some cases a payment was made to the trustees as an act of grace.

Not for long was the magnificent road on which Telford and Macadam lavished their fruitful genius to be the thronged highway of the nation. Watt had mastered the potentialities of steam; Stephenson had built the Rocket. The year 1838 was at hand. The doom of the mail-coach was too surely foreshadowed. For the Grand Junction Railway, which was already at work between Birmingham and Liverpool and Manchester, had cut short the triumphs of the South Lancashire coaches, and so made desolate the middle ground of the North Road mails; and the London and Birmingham Railway Bill had not only received the Royal Assent, but the first sod of the new line had been cut. By July 20, 1837, even the first length of 24½ miles of the iron way was completed from London to Boxmoor.

Still, up to the summer of 1837, and, in fact, as late as April, 1838, the highroads held their traffic, being comparatively undisturbed by the rail. Some new coaches, even, were put on them. At the latter date there were 59 first-class mail-coaches at work in England and Wales, 16 in Scotland, and 29 in

Ireland. There were also 72 second-class coaches carrying mails, besides unnumbered pair-horse and three and four horse stage-coaches.

It was not for twenty years after the opening of the Grand Junction line that the actual end of the Lancashire coaches came. The very last of the four-horse mail-coaches to run out of Manchester—the last, in fact, of the Midlands—was the old Derby mail, not the same coach which in earlier years had carried the London and Manchester night mail *via* Derby, Leek and Stockport, but that which ran by way of Buxton, Bakewell and Rowsley. It made its last trip on the first Saturday in October, 1858. But it had degenerated somewhat, and its cattle were not the blood steeds of the palmy coaching days.

A first-class mail-coach had to conform to the following inside 'sitting' dimensions. From roof to floor, 4 feet 8 inches; from roof to top of cushion, 3 feet 4 inches; from back to front, 4 feet 10 inches; from side to side, 3 feet 7 inches. Weight, it might be supposed, would have been a more important limitation.

The fastest of the 59 mails was the Liverpool and Preston coach. One would like to know how many changes there were in the 32 miles, and how long the beautiful horses which drew this swift coach, at about 11 miles an hour on the average, survived so trying a pace. Perhaps two years, or three at the most. The Post-Office paid for the coach no more than three halfpence a double mile.

But other mail-coaches ran the Preston mail pretty close. The Carlisle and Glasgow coach, as will have been seen, and the Bristol and Brighton coach (138 miles), were bound to a speed of 10·4 miles per hour. A new direct mail-coach from Bristol to Liverpool—one of the Duke of Richmond's extensions—ultimately ran over parts of the ground at a great pace; but in 1836 the contract time was no more than 9 miles 2 furlongs in the hour. Then came the famous London and Devonport mail: 10 miles 3 furlongs per hour.

After these 'fliers' of the road, three mail-coaches may be grouped together as running at 10·2 miles in the hour: the London and Bristol (121 miles), the Birmingham and Sheffield (75 miles 6 furlongs), and the Gloucester and Carmarthen (117 miles 7 furlongs). These were, of course, all four-horse coaches.

Again, there were ten other coaches which covered the ground at a speed of 10 miles an hour. The mileage rates were very various, as low as a halfpenny per mile (indeed, the Liverpool and Manchester coach took the mails for nothing; the railway, however, had been some years at work between the two cities), and as high as 11½d. for the Carmarthen and Pembroke coach, or even 1s. 3¾d. for the London and Dover (foreign mail) coach.

Epitomized, the four-horse night mail-coaches which conveyed the North and North-western mails to and from London, chiefly, though not exclusively, by the Great North Road, and which were running as

lately as April 4, 1838, are shown in the subjoined table:

Coach.	Rate and speed per hour.		Number of miles travelled.		Rate per annum of mileage and per double mile.	
	Miles.	Fur.	Miles.	Fur.	Per annum. £	Per mile. d.
London to Berwick ...	9	5	889	7	{ 922 to York 666 to Berwick	3½ 3
Carlisle <i>viâ</i> Wetherby) (Glasgow mail) ... }	9	6	802	7	1787 { to Wetherby to Carlisle	4½ 4
Derby.....	9	7	126	0	790	4½
Halifax	10	0	195	5	682	2½
Holyhead	10	1	259	2	1231	3½
Woodside (for Liver- pool)	9	6	205	0	1598	5½
Hull	9	6	172	5	1083	4½
Leeds	9	5	198	7	1284	4½
Louth.....	9	4	148	0	1879	5½

The day mail to Birmingham *viâ* Barnet ran at a speed of 10 miles 1 furlong per hour, and for the small payment of one penny per double mile.

From the date of the opening from London of the first considerable section of the Birmingham railway, the fate of the highway was sealed; for then began this fell opponent to sap the long traffic of the Great North Road. Section after section was thrown open to the public—as far as Tring by October, 1837; as far as Denbigh Hall (48 miles) by the following April, when the upper ground lost the four Birmingham night coaches altogether. They were all put on trucks at Euston Grove, and sent by rail to Denbigh Hall. The exact position of Denbigh Hall Station is doubtful; but tradition has it that the

rails, at the period mentioned, ended abruptly near a little inn a mile or two north of Bletchley, just where they touched the Great North Road. This, no doubt, was Denbigh Hall Station.

At length the railway was opened throughout from London to Birmingham, a distance of $112\frac{1}{4}$ miles, on September 20, 1838. The procession of mail-coaches on her Majesty's birthday wended its way through London for the last time; coach after coach was withdrawn; no more guards were appointed by the Post-Office.

Then the London and Birmingham Railway Company united their fortunes with the Grand Junction Line, which had already carried the mails from Birmingham to Liverpool and Manchester; the Midland Counties Railway Company cut a line from Rugby to Derby and Leeds; and away, at once and for ever, were spirited the glories of the Great North Road between London and Barnet, of the North-western Road from Barnet by Birmingham, and practically of the York Road through Potters' Bar.

Her Majesty's mails, with one exception, no longer swiftly bowl along the High Street of Chipping Barnet; but, as a survival of the past, there still remain on the walls of the General Post-Office the names of the 'roads' under which the mails going North are to this day grouped. The 'Chester Road,' the 'Preston Road,' the 'Carlisle Road,' all tell of the stirring years when the Birmingham Tally-Ho, the Shrewsbury Wonder, and the Manchester Tele-

graph were the pride of this great Northern highway.

In 1830, the legend goes, the Independent Tally-Ho, one of three Birmingham Tally-Ho's which ran along the Great North Road, covered on a special trip 109 miles in 7 hours 39 minutes—a feat which seems almost incredible. The Greyhound, another coach which passed through Barnet, performed also a special trip (but this was in 1838) from London to Shrewsbury at the rate of 12 miles an hour.

In the West of England, as in Scotland and in Ireland, mail-coaches yet flourished for a season; but the spoiler's hand, taking the form of railway extension, was soon to be raised against them.

If the final touches were given to the English mail-coach service when Lord Lichfield was Postmaster-General, yet to the Duke of Richmond no small credit is due for the improvements effected under his administration.

For two or three years, about 1832, the Post-Office was full of energy. Sir Francis Freeling was yet at his desk, and the Duke of Richmond was making his mark. No fewer than thirty-nine principal improvements were effected at that period. At the same time, and for some years later, Commissions of Inquiry were sitting on the Post-Office, and reporting with amazing fulness and frequency. They overhauled the mail-coaches, the packets, the establishments — nothing escaped their searching eyes.

The mail-coaches throughout the United Kingdom were generally accelerated, especially those to and from Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, Glasgow, the principal commercial districts, and the main cross-posts. Twelve new mail-coaches were established, and many old ones were extended and improved in their time-tables. Lord Lichfield completed the work by tightening up the running all round.

CHAPTER II.

THE WEST OF ENGLAND MAILS.

THERE is much vitality in old titles and old phrases in the Post-Office; and so, although, as the thirties faded, the rail superseded the road, the good old designation of Mail-Coach Office survived at the General Post-Office until 1854.

In two cases, at least, if not in three, the Mail-Coach Office drew its head from the West. Mr. George Louis, an officer who is described as having a 'thorough knowledge of the details of the service,' had been Surveyor of the Western District from 1824. In 1835 he was appointed, in succession to Mr. Charles Johnson, formerly chief clerk in the Secretary's office, to be Surveyor and Superintendent of Mail-Coaches. When he came to the head of the Mail-Coach Office, Mr. George Stow (a name which is preserved in the Post-Office to the fourth generation) succeeded to the West of England surveyorship.

Daniel William Stow, father of George Stow, was Superintending President of the Inland Office in 1835. He was one of the two proprietors (Mr. Watts

being the other) of the money-order office as then in operation. These two gentlemen found the necessary capital, charged 8d. in the pound as commission, which realized £2,000 a year, and shared the proceeds with the Postmasters. The annual profits of the money-order business were variously estimated by the proprietors at from £446 to £672, but £533 seems to have been the exact average. Mr. D. W. Stow died about 1835. His grandson retired a few years ago from the post of Metropolitan Surveyor, and his great-grandson is an officer of the department.

On the resignation of Mr. Louis in July, 1838, Mr. George Stow in turn took charge of the mail-coaches, until his death in 1852. He had been followed in the West by Mr. G. H. Creswell, father of the Secretary of the Post-Office in Ireland, and at St. Martin's-le-Grand by Mr. W. T. Wedderburn. But by 1852 mail-coaches had been entirely played out; and in August, 1854, just before my own appointment to the Post-Office, the Mail-Coach Office was abolished, and a new branch was established under the title of the Mail Office, which lasted for about fifteen years, then grew unwieldy, and was in its turn also abolished.

Over the Mail Office was set my earliest predecessor in the title of Inspector-General of Mails, the late Mr. Edward John Page. Many old railway servants will still call to mind the attractive presence and trained intelligence of this brilliant official. On his retirement, the late Mr. Arthur Benthall was ap-

pointed Inspector-General of Mails, and in 1882 the post was conferred upon me.

When George Louis was made Superintendent of Mail-Coaches, and removed in 1835 to London, he left the Western roads in the full glory of that admirable mail-coach system of which John Palmer of Bath, at the close of the previous century, had laid the solid foundation. There were, it is true, some accelerations to come, but the system practically was in its prime.

Out of London at night the Post-Office despatched the mails for the West of England by two great thoroughfares, partly by that to Uxbridge and Oxford, but mainly by the Bath road, which traverses Hounslow. The latter is of so much interest in connection with the West of England mail-coaches that a short account of this famous highway and its principal branches will probably be acceptable.

From Hyde Park Corner through Brentford to Hounslow, the first stage out of London, is 10 miles. There the road for Salisbury and Exeter bears off to the left hand, the Bath road inclining to the right hand. Both go over the original Heath. Let us follow out the Bath road proper.

It passes through Colnbrook to Maidenhead, where it throws out a spur, which forms a second route to Oxford, almost as direct as that of the Uxbridge road and High Wycombe. From Maidenhead the road proceeds to Reading and Marlborough, and there enters on those wide-spreading Downs which abound

in barrows and other memorials of early British days. From Beckhampton on the Downs the Bristol coach pursued the even tenor of its way to Chippenham and Bath direct; but the Bath mail proper turned aside and swooped round by Devizes, so as to take in that town and Melksham. So far the Bath and Bristol road. Let us revert to Hounslow.

It is at the tenth milestone from London that the Exeter road branches out of the Bath road. It makes straight as a dart for Staines, over ground where galloping was habitual in the old days, and then runs through Bagshot and Hartford Bridge Flats to Basingstoke, Whitchurch, and Andover. Here is an important point. Exeter lies 110 miles ahead; virtually there are three roads to choose from, all of which again unite at Honiton, 16 miles short of Exeter, viz.: (1) by Salisbury, Blandford, Dorchester, and Axminster; (2) by Salisbury, Shaftesbury, Sherborne, Yeovil, and Chard; and, quickest of all, (3) by Amesbury (leaving Salisbury some miles to the left hand), Wile, Mere, Wincanton, Ilchester, and Ilminster.

Because of its position on the Bath and Exeter roads, Hounslow was of no mean importance as a coaching town. As at Barnet, the Red Lion welcomed the wayfarer, and with the George, the Prince Regent, and the Marquis of Granby, shared the posting. The mail-coach horses stood chiefly at Mr. Chaplin's own stables (where in 1835 he kept 150), or at the Crown and Cushion Inn; which latter,

altered somewhat, still exists. Chaplin, the younger, it is said, owned altogether 1,300 horses; in April, 1835, he certainly had 1,200. He owned also the great coaching-house of the Swan with Two Necks in Lad Lane.

But the highwayman who meant to rob the Exeter mail probably stabled his thoroughbred, or at least primed himself with a final cup, at the Bell Inn, which is still in its original condition, standing exactly as it stood when Hounslow Heath extended to its very water-trough, and when the timid, going westwards, began to quake as the cheerful light of its bar parlour waned on the view, and they neared the solitary part, to the right of the site of the powder-mills. At least six or eight mail-coaches passed through at night in each direction, and they were a mere drop in the ocean of vehicular traffic. The day-coaches, which left London before noon by the Bath road, were eighteen in number; so that the double journeys of mail and day and night stage-coaches alone through this important town could hardly have been fewer than sixty per diem.

Fine as was the condition of the Bath road in the prime days of coaches—so fine that parts were complained of as being too good, and tending to make coachmen careless—there was a time, even in this century, when a great coaching-master said he had known the road to be two feet deep in mud across Hounslow Heath. Of the London and Brighton road, it was alleged that ‘it spoilt the breed of coach-

men,' so excellent was its condition. Experts expressed the opinion (but surely they went too far!) that on the twenty-four Brighton coaches an 'artist' was scarcely to be found, all the difficulties of the roadway, which developed skill and resource on the box, having been smoothed away.

Bath, as was proper, had the use of two mail-coaches with London. It was still the great watering-place of the West—even of the whole country—for the fame of its curative waters and its gaieties, though dimmed somewhat since the days of Beau Nash, were yet attractive to the rich, and a large correspondence had to be provided for. Moreover, Bath was the point of junction of no fewer than six great mail-roads, and if the London and Bristol coach was overloaded, there was the Bath coach proper, which broke out of the London road at Beckhampton and ran through Devizes, and afterwards made for Wells and Bridgwater and Exeter to relieve it.

If Bath took the palm for writing more frequently than other towns letters closed by seals enriched with armorial bearings, the citizens of Bristol had, from the mercantile point of view, the more important correspondence. They knew what it was to pay 2s. on a letter from Jamaica or New York, and 3s. on one from Egypt; and to write by the Flanders mail every Tuesday and Friday to the Continent, monthly to the Brazils at a postage to Rio de Janeiro of about 3s. 6d., and monthly to North America.

Bristol being the head and centre of the sugar

trade, its foreign and colonial correspondence was large. Such letters were usually enclosed in brass-labelled white leather bags, touching which a story may with some reserve be repeated.

During the war in the East, in 1854, white leather bags were also used for Government despatches. A consular servant obtained possession of two empty bags of this sort, which he forthwith converted into commodious small-clothes for personal use and adornment. The theft remained undiscovered until, one hot summer's day, the wearer mechanically threw off his coat. Then, as he turned his back on the spectators, the boldly stencilled inscription, 'G.P.O., London,' betrayed him to English eyes.

Nor was Bristol behind Bath as a junction point. Four great coach-roads came to a focus there, and mail-coaches, to say nothing of rides to places nearer at hand, ran to and from London, Exeter, Birmingham, and Portsmouth, and Cardiff, Swansea, and Hobb's Point, in Milford Haven. The coach for the last-named place crossed the estuary of the Severn at New Passage. The Post-Office allowed an hour for crossing. Now the Severn is passed by means of the Tunnel in a few minutes.

To go behind the year 1832, and glance at Bristol, fast approaching its thousand years of corporate life, at the period when it was the second port in the kingdom, is irresistible.

Even in 1671 it had a post-office—at any rate, an office for letters. In fact, as far back as 1600 a

Bristol postmaster is spoken of; but he, no doubt, had post-horses rather than post-letters to attend to. In 1700 Henry Pyne—who may have been the postmaster—built a new office in Small Street. That one lasted until 1738, when it was pulled down, and Thomas Pyne—who certainly was the postmaster, and possibly a grandson of Henry—established himself in Corn Street, where Post-Office Chambers stand. There the office remained for a hundred and twenty years, when—that is, in 1868—it was moved back again to Small Street, to the new building which now houses the department.

During the hundred and twenty years of the sojourn in Corn Street not a few changes had been seen, among them the rise and fall of the mail-coaches and the end of the high rates of postage. The Bristol Post-Office sixty years ago delivered fewer than 20,000 letters in a week, or about 1,000,000 in a year; now in a year the Bristol postal district delivers 32,000,000. Fifty years ago the staff consisted of a postmaster and five clerks. It now consists of 800 established officers; in fact, if the sub-offices and mail-drivers be included, it gives employment to 1,365 persons.

Bristol had long enjoyed a local penny post. In the thirties that post covered a wide area, from Thornbury in the north, and Wotton-under-Edge, to Temple Cloud, Cheriton, Mendip, and even Oakhill, in the south; eastwards to a point near Box, and westwards to Portishead.

When uniform penny postage came, in 1840, the citizens found it was no cheaper than before to send a single letter to Chew Magna; but a light enclosure could be put in without extra charge, though the weight had to be brought down from four ounces to half an ounce, and, at any rate, 1s. 6d. had no longer to be paid on a letter to Elgin. Mail conveyances in local use were of primitive order, one for Shirehampton being drawn by a dog.

In 1855 the amount of postage collected at Bristol in the year was £28,510. Now, the total collection cannot annually be less than half a million of pounds, part of which, however, is, of course, merely a deposit, such as foreign telegrams and savings banks, money order and postal order transactions, necessitate.

From Birmingham in the north-west to Exeter in the south-west, the great highway which the Bath road struck into midway was thickly studded with posting towns. St. Aldate's Square at Gloucester saw daily the mail-coaches starting at various hours for Worcester, for Hereford, Gloucester and Bristol, Monmouth and Carmarthen, Oxford and London, not to speak of the mail rides to Chepstow, Minchinhampton, Newent, and Cheltenham. At Taunton, North Devon and South Wilts joined hands across; at Exeter six mail-coach roads were at work. A passenger could 'coach' from Falmouth to Glasgow, from Portsmouth to Holyhead, from Barnstaple to Berwick, with changes and stoppages, it is true, but by a continuous mail-coach road, without passing

through London. The country resounded with the blast of the horn and the rattle of pole-chains.

Bridgwater, $33\frac{1}{4}$ miles west of Bristol, and on the direct road from Bath and Bristol to Taunton and Exeter, although a town of note before the Norman Conquest, had in 1840 certainly not more than 10,000 inhabitants. At all events, at the previous census it contained only 7,807 persons. Yet, at the moment when the West of England mails still held the road, it was supplied with no fewer than fourteen coaches, showing, in the case even of a town of moderate dimensions, how active was that part of the road work which provided for the movement of the population by coach. Bridgwater's wants were also fed by seven waggons and twenty-six parcel carts and other carriers' conveyances.

If Bridgwater, a roadside town with a population of 10,000 persons, could make so brave a show, what might not Exeter, the capital of Devon and the gate of Cornwall, do in the way of coach accommodation for its 30,000 inhabitants?

In the early and mid thirties, it is computed by one writer that on an average seventy coaches left Exeter daily; and a well-informed correspondent is of opinion that they were even more numerous.

The New London Inn, known as 'Pople's,' was the main point of departure and arrival. The Old London Inn shared the work. The coaching—the posting perhaps included—gave employment, it is said, to about 3,000 persons in the parish of St. Sidwell alone.

When King William IV. came to the throne, his Majesty's mails from London to the West followed this course: The Falmouth mail went by Salisbury, Dorchester, Exeter, and Launceston. It left London at 8 p.m., was at Salisbury at 6.12 a.m., at Exeter at 4.2 p.m., and reached Falmouth at 6.44 a.m. on the third day. Time and distance: London to Exeter, 176 miles in 20 hours; to Falmouth, 273 miles in $34\frac{3}{4}$ hours. This was the old Exeter mail.

Through Salisbury and Yeovil ran the Devonport mail. It left London at eight o'clock, kept as far as Sarum slightly ahead of the Falmouth coach, reached Yeovil at 8.56 a.m., and was, by the shorter route, at Exeter at 2.14 p.m., and at Devonport at 7.42 p.m. Time and distance: London to Exeter, 170 miles in $18\frac{1}{4}$ hours; to Devonport, 219 miles in $23\frac{3}{4}$ hours. This was the famous Quicksilver mail. As yet the Amesbury and Wincanton road was not used for mail-coach purposes.

But there is nothing new under the sun. On August 12, 1814, thirty years earlier than the Quicksilver's best achievement by Yeovil, the subscription coach from London to Exeter, with nine passengers and three hundredweight of luggage, performed the journey in 16 hours and 55 minutes.

There was a third route, which was really a prolongation of the London and Bath mail, *viâ* Devizes. It went through Wells to Bridgwater, and so got on to the Bristol and Exeter road. The mail by this route left London at 8 p.m., was at Bath at

7.54 a.m., at Taunton at 2.22 p.m., at Exeter at 6.45 p.m., and at Devonport at 12.25 midnight. Time and distance: London to Exeter, 195 miles in $22\frac{3}{4}$ hours; to Devonport, 245 miles in $28\frac{1}{2}$ hours.

A local service between Devonport and Falmouth allowed through passengers to have a short night's rest at Elliott's Royal Hotel, in Devonport. Going on again at 7 a.m., they would reach Falmouth, through St. Austell, at 4.22 p.m. Distance, 66 miles more, or, from London, 311 miles; time, $44\frac{1}{2}$ hours.

At her Majesty's accession, the time-bills of the two routes to Falmouth, *i.e.*, by Dorchester and by Bridgwater, remained virtually unchanged, but notable alterations were made in the service to Exeter and Devonport along the roads which lay between.

A new coach, starting at 8 p.m., went from London to Exeter, *via* Salisbury and Yeovil, and arrived at 2.12 p.m.— $18\frac{1}{4}$ hours from London. This was the new Exeter mail; distance, 170 miles.

It was with the Exeter mail, through Yeovil, that a brother officer of mine, Mr. Moses Nobbs, the mail guard, met with a sad experience. He started from London with the down night mail in the usual course. At Hounslow the coachman proved to be intoxicated. Mr. Nobbs made him exchange places, strapping his colleague in the guard's seat, and he himself taking the reins.

At Whitchurch, on the London side of Andover, the coachman, apparently sobered, unstrapped himself, and resumed the box-seat and the whip. A few

miles further the coach jolted over a heap of stones ; the coachman fell between the horses and was killed on the spot. The old Exeter mail-coach, which ran through Salisbury, following shortly after, found the body of the hapless coachman, and a mile further on the bruised and shaken guard. The horses, driverless, had broken into full gallop, and Mr. Nobbs, in endeavouring to regain control, himself had fallen from the coach. The horses ran in good order, got down a steep hill without damage to the coach, and pulled up in Andover at the usual place. The plucky guard went on with his bags to Exeter. He had another, and, if possible, still more memorable experience, which shall be related further on.

The famous Quicksilver was next taken through Amesbury and Wincanton, so avoiding Salisbury and Yeovil altogether, saving, perhaps, three or four miles. It was then especially that this coach won its laurels. The object was to get to Devonport, as though no other town on the way was of the least account. And it went like the wind.

The coach started from the Old White Horse Cellar, in Piccadilly, at 8.30 p.m., the mails being conveyed from St. Martin's-le-Grand by cart, drawn by blood horses, to the coach. It was at Bagshot, 29 miles from the Post-Office, by 10.45 p.m., figures which give an idea of the rate of travelling. To cover 26 miles from Piccadilly in $2\frac{1}{4}$ hours meant, of course, a speed of nearly 11 miles an hour. The coach was in Exeter at 12.34 the next forenoon—*i.e.*, in $16\frac{1}{2}$

hours from the Post-Office—and was due at Devonport at 5.14 p.m. It left the New London Inn, at Exeter, on the return journey at 2 p.m., *via* Ilminster and Wincanton, reached London at six o'clock in the morning, and the mails were at the Post-Office by half-past six.

An effective drawing—belonging, I think, to the late Mr. Gould, Clerk of the Works at the General Post-Office—represented the Quicksilver attempting with six horses to keep time through the deep snows of the winter of 1836, post-boys riding the near leaders.

If the pride of the road was the Quicksilver, it had a rival in the Telegraph, a day coach. The appearance presented by these famous coaches as they stood at the Old White Horse Cellar, or Nelson's Office, equipped for the first stage out of London, has been referred to by a well-known writer in lively terms of high professional appreciation: 'Four blood chestnuts, with ring snaffles, no side-reins or check-reins, no crossing or lapping of traces, no throat-lashing the leaders.' It is nearly sixty years since, but the picture appeals to the imagination as forcibly as ever.

The Telegraph had run the famous mail very close. 'Superior travelling,' says an advertisement of April 7, 1832, 'by the "Telegraph" Patent Safety Coach from Exeter to London in one day. Leaves the Old London Inn every morning at 5, and arrives at Nelson's Office, 52, Piccadilly, punctually at 10

the same evening, whence it proceeds to the Bull Inn, Aldgate.'

But on July 22, 1837, the time for the Telegraph was still 17 hours, while the Quicksilver was doing the same journey in 16 hours; yet the Telegraph had had the honour of showing the mails the way across country for a long time, for while prior to August 23, 1836, they had taken, at least, 20 hours from London, *viâ* Dorchester (reaching Exeter at 4.2 p.m.), and 18½ *viâ* Yeovil, the Telegraph, as will have been seen, had proved itself the swifter coach by an hour to three hours, at least four years earlier. But it ran by day and the others by night.

As regards the Quicksilver, it is said that on one occasion an amateur whip, Captain Sheriff, drove the mail from London to Devonport, a feat which my informant, writing from Exeter, alleges has never been surpassed. But if history tells true, this achievement pales before the performance of Captain Barclay, whose fame as an expert coachman was fifty years ago on every lip. He, it is said, drove the Edinburgh mail all the way down from London, 400 miles, without a break. It is difficult to realize the great physical strength and endurance which this feat implies, although, of course, there is an approach to it in that of any outside passenger who sat still for 42 hours without being overpowered by fatigue.

Three fine old coachmen of the past can yet testify to the glories of the Quicksilver: Mr. William Lake, of Exeter; Mr. Killingly, of Crosslands, Wellington;



44 *FORTY YEARS AT THE POST-OFFICE*

and the well-known Mr. C. S. Ward, of Brompton, who drove on the middle and lower ground. On one occasion Mr. Ward took the Quicksilver from Exeter to Devonport in $3\frac{1}{4}$ hours, and for some months did not exceed 4 hours on the journey. The distance being 50 miles, the rate of travelling ranged from 12 to 14 miles an hour.

There are not many men who, having served the Post-Office in conveying its mails in 1832, are still engaged in that important work in 1894, yet in 1832 Mr. Lake, who is now a mail-cart contractor at Exeter, drove the mail-coach between Exeter and Falmouth in connection with the night mails from London, the journey from London to Falmouth occupying at first as much as 48 hours. In Mr. Lake's latest years on the box the journey from Exeter to Falmouth occupied from 7.30 p.m. of one day to 4.30 a.m. the next, the coach passing through Crockernwell, where a stable of forty horses was kept, to Okehampton, thence to Launceston, Five Lanes, the Jamaica Inn, Truro, and Falmouth.

The mail then maintained a speed of 10 miles an hour between Exeter and Falmouth, inclusive of all stoppages, and admirable time was kept in reaching its destination. The private coaches were continually entering into rivalry with the mail-coaches, and hence it was that the journey each way was every year accelerated.

The old Exeter mail by Dorchester, adds Mr. Lake, was partly engaged in carrying convicts from the

south and west, and therefore obtained the name of the Transport. The convicts were sent for imprisonment in Dorchester, or for hard labour in Portsmouth Dockyard. A penal establishment was maintained at Devonport, such prisoners as were enduring short terms of punishment being kept in hulks. Thus Mr. William Lake, of Exeter.

The fame of the Quicksilver had been established while the coach still followed the old road through Salisbury and Yeovil to Exeter. That the coach took even another road before the diversion to Amesbury (or 'Ambresbury,' as Paterson has it in his index) and Wincanton is established beyond a doubt by the following letter of the Duke of Beaufort, which his Grace was kind enough recently to write to me on the subject :

'I am not going to say that the Quicksilver mail never ran *via* Amesbury and Wincanton, but I do say, and will give you proof positive, that it did run for many years through Amesbury and Salisbury. It was at Winterslow that the lioness escaped from a menagerie and killed one of the leaders of the Quicksilver mail. That lies between the Golden Ball and Salisbury. The Golden Ball is on the Down and going from Salisbury, past Winterslow Hut, a public-house where the mail changed horses. Here the roads fork, the right-hand one going to Stockbridge (where it forks again, right to Winchester, left to Basingstoke), the left to Andover.

‘Little Simpson drove the Quicksilver over that ground. One night, very dark and snowing, no passenger inside or out, going from Andover, when just through the village (Mullen Pond), where the brook runs through and there are now some small ironworks, he sprang the horses up the hill out of the village; suddenly he saw the leaders bob to the near side, and the shaft of a waggon coming down the hill went into the chest of the off wheel-horse, killing him instantly. At a gallop Simpson, who barely weighed nine stone, was shot clean over the heads of the leaders, and the guard was sent flying through the air and snow and landed on the dead wheel-horse. With the help of the two men with the waggon, they put one leader in, off-side wheel, and drove pickaxe to the change, which was Winterslow Hut. Old Simpson, who was for forty years stud-groom to the late Sir Watkin Williams Wynn, has often told me the story.’

The escape of the lioness and her attack on the horses of the Exeter mail caused at the time a great sensation in the public mind—next only to that occasioned by the shooting of a well-known elephant in the menagerie at Exeter Change, in London.

The Dorchester route lay through Blandford. The Post-Office maintained a branch ride to Sturminster—12 miles off the mail-road—and no doubt took care that the way was made commodious and safe. But improvements of the thoroughfares were not entirely

to local taste. It was with respect to the latter road, perhaps, that the famous remark of the Blandford waggoner applies: 'Roads have but one object,' said he, 'waggon driving—I require but 5-foot width in a lane, and all the rest may——' Here the anecdote breaks off.

At Exeter, in Paul Street, 'four horses harnessed for the road and two post-boys awaited,' says Mr. Cossins,* 'any emergency.' If the mail-coach had left for London on the arrival of the homeward mail, *riâ* Falmouth, away from Exeter went the express; a mounted messenger galloping ahead with Government despatches, a chaise-and-four following with the mails as hard as the boys could ply the whip. The sights were stirring for the villagers along the road as the expresses rode through them.

Once, at Exeter Post-Office, which was then a single room, now a registry, in Catherine Street, part of the outward West India mail was left behind. The packet had been detained at Falmouth for four days awaiting the upshot of a Parliamentary debate on the all-important question of the duty on sugar.

At last the vote was taken, and the latest letters came down. The Exeter Office closed the mail, and, as they thought, forwarded the whole of it. Four hours and a half later, when the mail-coach was midway between Okehampton and Launceston, the night porter at Exeter rubbed his sleepy eyes, and the alarming sight of a large brown leather

* 'Exeter Fifty Years Since,' 1877.

object brought him to his feet. It was the portmanteau containing despatches and instructions from the Colonial Office and other Government offices, for the governors, agents and consuls in the British and Foreign West Indies. Then was proved the value of the practice of keeping horses saddled in their stalls, and riders booted and spurred. In a twinkling a man and horse shot forward, like arrow from the bow, to warn all the posting-stations right away along 97 miles of road to Falmouth. At breakneck pace followed, from the New London Inn, a chaise-and-four with the overlooked despatches. A start of $4\frac{1}{2}$ hours was formidable enough to face, but what was that to Devon and Cornwall put upon their mettle? Like a whirlwind went the express to Crockernwell. There they changed horses, and on with fresh energy they flew through the pleasant Cornish towns—through Five Lanes and Bodmin, by ‘Indian Queen’ (is that existent still, I wonder?), and so through Truro and Penryn to the waterside. They made up four hours in the 95 miles, for the coach was not yet running at full speed, but the half-hour unredeemed had admitted of embarkation and despatch. There was still a chance. They flung the portmanteau into a boat and chased the packet. Pendennis Castle probably fired a gun; the flagstaff ran up a signal. The packet heard, saw, and hove to, and the feat was accomplished of overtaking the mail and putting the portmanteau on board, a fact which ought to have condoned oversights at Exeter.

When Stow in turn had left Exeter to take up the London appointment, and the selection of Creswell to succeed him had not been finally settled, Major Byng Hall was put in command. He soon let it be understood that grass did not grow under the Acting-Surveyor's feet in the West of England. 'Sir,' wrote he from Torquay on December 28, 1838, to the postmaster of Exeter, 'as it is highly desirable that the public should be made acquainted with the time of arrival and departure of the different mails, I desire that the following notice may be printed and posted up in a conspicuous part of your office-window.' The Major proceeded to descant on the proposed use of the Bristol Estafette. It was an ordinary stage-coach, and the employment of such for mail purposes was a novelty. It made off from Exeter at 8.25 a.m., with mails only for Scotland, Ireland, and the North of England.

Then were in full operation in the West those exceptional accelerations for which, it is to be feared, horses paid full dearly. For although careful driving, short stages, good roads, fair weather, and light loads do, no doubt, admit of a high average rate of speed, yet what about bad weather, stiff hills, and the roadway soft and spongy from frost and wet? At all times such a run as that of the Liverpool and Preston mail must have severely tried the powers of even four horses. But, whether hilly or level, foul weather or fine, a pace which should greatly exceed 8 miles an hour—the rate of travelling of the

parcel mail-coaches of the present day—must have meant heaving flanks and exhausted cattle at every change, and could not be long maintained, unless under very short stages, except at serious cost of animal life. Although I do not claim to possess any special knowledge of the subject, gained from experience on the road, yet it is only necessary to read the evidence of the great horse-masters of the past to be convinced that the average life of the coach-horse of the mail-coach period—even of those beautiful and high-couraged animals described as half-blood horses—was regrettably short. .

On the other hand, so high an authority as Mr. C. S. Ward informs me that the well-bred horses which he drove at so great a pace lasted for years. Sometimes hunters were in summer put to the coach, worked over the short stages, and found fit to hunt with the hounds again as the season came round. But even Mr. Ward inclines to 8 miles an hour, and 14 miles a day as the amount of work proper (with occasional rests) for keeping a sound, well-bred, well-fed coach-horse in good health. I gather that such is not far from being the opinion of the Duke of Beaufort, too; and this concurrence of view seems to me to settle the point.

The ride from Leominster to Aberystwith was 73 miles long. It went through Rhayader and Pentre, and so over a part of Plinlimmon. Such a ride in winter was one that few would care now to face. The drivers or the riders of the cross-posts in

the thirties were welcomed at every stage. For instance, Mr. Evers, formerly postmaster of Westbury, Wilts, recollects in 1832 the post-boy coming in with the mail from Melksham, out of the down London and Bath night mail-coach—colours streaming from his hat, and his horse's head adorned, as though the young Herminia had spared bright ribands 'from her own gay attire'—because of great political tidings, such as the satisfactory upshot of the agitation for a Reform of the Parliamentary Franchise.

As time wore on, the chief mail-gigs were replaced by mail-coaches. In 1836, besides the old-established fours-in-hand from Gloucester to Carmarthen at 10 miles 2 furlongs per hour, and Bristol to Milford Haven, the Cheltenham and Hereford and Cheltenham and Aberystwith coaches had long been at work. A mail-coach from Kingsbridge still survives, except that it now runs not to Totnes, as in the thirties, but to Dartmouth. Still some long cart-rides remain, such as that from Bath to Westbury, which has kept its time-table for thirty-six years, being due daily now, as it was in 1858, at 4.50 a.m. This ride goes on to Steeple Langford, 29½ miles from Bath, and despite its early start (2.20 a.m. from the night mail train up, due at Bath at 1.3 a.m.), it arrives there at 6.30 a.m.

Taunton stretches out two long arms, touching the English Channel on one side and the Bristol Channel on the other. It serves Bridport with its London

night mail by train to Ilminster (11½ miles), and thence by mail-cart 22 miles further. Similarly, Minehead receives its letters out of the London night mail down by pair-horse cart from Taunton, a distance of 25 miles, by 6.40 a.m.

At the Jubilee *Conversazione* of Penny Postage, held at the South Kensington Museum on July 2, 1890, an address of welcome from old officers of the Post-Office was delivered into the hands of her Royal and Imperial Highness the Duchess of Edinburgh by Mr. Nobbs, as the last of the mail-coach guards. He had already served the Post-Office for fifty-four years, having commenced coach-work so early as 1836 as guard of the London and Stroud Mail. He was still on active duty in 1891.

Mr. Nobbs relates many anecdotes which throw up in high relief the hardships—nay, the perils—of the mail-service in the coaching age. I have already mentioned one of his experiences while employed as guard on the Exeter mail. Here is another, told in his own words, of a catastrophe which happened nearly sixty years ago in Mid-Wales :

‘In 1838 I was transferred to the Cheltenham and Aberystwith mail, leaving Cheltenham at 7.0 a.m., and arriving at Aberystwith at 9.0 p.m. I worked this mail for sixteen years—from 1838 to 1854—and this was the most eventful period of my career. The road ran through a fearful country, and we had to go over Plinlimmon Mountain, the top of which is

about 2,000 feet above the sea-level. We had many accidents and adventures with this coach. For example, we left Hereford one market day, the wind blowing a hurricane. When we reached St. Owen's turnpike-gate I saw that the gate was closed, and blew the horn for the gate-keeper to open it. He threw the gate wide open, when it rebounded and struck one of the leaders, which so frightened the team that they got completely out of hand, and galloped down the road as fast as they could lay feet to the ground. The coachman was a very nervous man, and, finding he could not control the horses or pull them up, he threw himself off the box into the road, with the result that the back part of his head was dashed in. The horses, now at full gallop, ran into a donkey-cart in which an old woman and her daughter were going home from market, and doubled it up completely. The daughter heard the noise of the approaching coach, and jumped out in time to save herself, but the poor old woman was kicked to death before I could cut the harness to release the leaders, which had fallen and got mixed up with the remains of the cart. I had the bodies of the old woman and the coachman placed on hurdles and carried to the infirmary. Meanwhile the leaders had broken loose from the coach and galloped on for about two miles. They did further mischief by running into another cart, but without doing any serious damage.'

And yet one more anecdote, which records the most



wonderful escape from utter destruction I ever remember to have heard of :

‘On another occasion on the Cheltenham and Aberystwith mail we escaped with our lives in an almost miraculous manner. This happened in passing over Plinlimmon. It was a fearful night. The snow had been falling for hours before we got to the top of the mountain at Stedfa-gerrig, and after going for about a mile downhill we found ourselves enveloped in a dense fog and snowstorm. We completely lost our way. We had a post-boy in front as guide, but unfortunately he missed the road, and took us over a precipice about sixty feet deep. The coachman and I, without any effort on our part, performed the acrobatic feat of turning two complete somersaults before we reached the bottom. I remember distinctly that my one thought was how I could avoid being crushed under the falling coach. We both escaped this, however, and, owing to the depth of the snow, were quite unhurt by the fall, though much shaken, of course. The two inside passengers were cut about a good deal by the glass of the windows, and two of the horses were killed. The next thing was to right the coach and get the living horses loose, which was an extremely difficult thing to do, as the snow was very deep at the bottom. It took us two hours to get things together again, and fortunately we discovered that there was an old Roman road near where we were ; so at last we got started, and made up a good deal of time before we

got to Cheltenham, arriving there just in time to catch the up London mail.'

Some details of the road are worth preserving. A mail-coach weighed between 17 and 18 cwt. It cost £140. The best mail-coach which Lacy, the great Manchester contractor, ever built weighed 17 cwt. 2 qrs., The swiftest coach out of London, swifter even than the Shrewsbury Wonder, was the Manchester Telegraph. The vehicle itself weighed between 16 and 17 cwt. by one account, and between 17 and 18 by another. For 'business, lightness and elegance' it is said to have been a model for mail-coaches. The life of a coach was only five or six years.

Quick coaches had five lamps; one had even six—*i.e.*, a tail lamp, as well as five front lights. Unless well lighted they could not keep time. Six lamps cost £47 8s. a year for oil alone. Of course, more than one coach was wanted to work a long road. The London and Gloucester mail, which ran 108 double miles daily, required three coaches; the Manchester Defiance (187 double miles), five.

A good coach needed an establishment of nearly, if not quite, a horse per mile, which cost for maintenance a guinea, sundries 4s.; total, 25s. per week.

Government duty was a formidable item, *viz.*: 2d. a mile, as well as £5 for an annual license. The elder Chaplin, with not quite 800 horses, paid £25,000 a year; Finch Vidler, who provided coaches, £20,000. The latter did things on so large a scale

that he kept in stock as many as 300 sets of wheels.

For coachmen a drive of 70 miles a day was deemed sufficient. Captain Malet, however, tells us of a man who drove the Norwich mail 112 miles daily without missing a journey. There must have been in those days giants on the box. As for mail-guards, Mr. Louis testified that twelve were employed on the London and Edinburgh mail-coach, which, taking the round trip at 800 miles, would give a daily spell of rather less than 70 miles per guard. But some guards worked over much longer distances, and they, no doubt, had then a day off. For example, Mr. Nobbs went through from London to Exeter, 170 miles, without a break. He rested the next day, as a matter of course, and another guard worked the up journey.

Before Collinge took out his patent for improved axles, wheels were secured to the axletree by linchpins. Once when Mr. Frederic Hill (who for a long time was Assistant-Secretary in the Post-Office) was travelling by coach, out came the linch-pin, off went the wheel, and over went the coach. No one, however, was the worse for a somersault.

Mr. Robert Nelson, of the Belle Sauvage, had 400 horses. He found by experience that, in order to keep up an average speed of $9\frac{1}{2}$ miles an hour from end to end, it was needful to run at the rate of 10 between the stages.

Tolls varied with the road. A coach which ran

daily — *i.e.*, seven days a week — from London to Cheltenham paid £65 a month, if it were not a mail and exempt from toll under the Postal Act.

W. Chaplin changed one-third of his stock every year; in other words, a mail-coach horse remained fit for work not more than three years. In the country, with light roads and pure air, they did better. November, in London, during mild foggy weather, was an exceedingly unfavourable month. Horses attacked by epidemic fever were carried off at once.

Horne, Chaplin and Sherman were men of such honour that John Waude, coach-builder, declared before a Parliamentary Committee that, in dealing with them, he would as soon take their word as their bond.

The first note of the swan-song of the West of England mail-coaches was sounded by the opening of the Great Western Railway from London to Maidenhead on June 4, 1838. In 1839 the iron road had got as far as Twyford; by 1840 to Faringdon Road (now Uffington) Station; in fact, by the end of the year it reached Wootton Bassett, 83 miles from Paddington.

Meanwhile, the line had been completed and opened (August 31, 1840) between Bath and Bristol; but the heavy work of boring the Box Tunnel delayed the joining together of the isolated sections. At last, on June 30, 1841, the length from Wootton Bassett to Bath was completed, and on that day trains ran

through without a break, 118½ miles, between Paddington and Bristol.

Bit by bit, as the railway progressed, the Bath road had been shorn of its splendours; the traffic on the upper ground had grown thinner and thinner. The London mail-coaches at length vanished into space. The Tally Ho! the Royal Blue, the Monarch, the Hero, even the Night Regulator, lighted their lamps and polished up their pole-chains no more; the post-boys cracked their short-handled, thick-twisted whip-lashes for the last time, and the highway was soon abandoned to farm-carts and the turn-pikes.

Not on the Bath road alone, but everywhere else, when the forties were born, coach after coach was withdrawn or shortened its journey. The list of mail-guards had long since begun to shrink. In the year of her Majesty's accession 52 new mail-coach guard appointments are stated to have been made; but in 1843 there was only one such new appointment. Yet in the latter year some traces of the vitality of former days existed, as 327 mail-guards were still doing duty; but their course, all the same, was run.

The Dukes of Manchester and Richmond, Lord Maryborough and the Marquis of Conyngham, as Postmasters-General, between 1830 and 1835, beheld the mail-coaches in full splendour. So for a time, did Thomas William, Earl of Lichfield, but between 1838 and 1841 he saw also their decline and fall.

Just fifty years later the horn of the mail-guard

once more sounded on the Great Western road between London and Reading, as the heads of the Post-Office conducted over its broad level surface the trial trip of the new four-horse coach now working the Royal Parcel Mail between London and Oxford. On that road, as an echo of the stirring past, the cheerful blast may still be heard at midnight at Maidenhead.



CHAPTER III.

THE CELT AND THE GAEL.

FROM a very early time indeed in the history—at any rate, the modern history—of the Post-Office efforts have been directed at frequent intervals to shorten the period of transit of the mails, and improve generally the means of communication between London and the capitals of the sister-kingdoms.

When I entered the Post-Office, Rowland Hill was framing and giving effect to schemes with this view. When the appointment of Inspector-General of Mails was conferred on me, my earliest work was in this direction. My latest work, too, was to carry out a new packet service to Ireland, and to propose, though not to accomplish, ameliorations of the postal service elsewhere.

The lines of traffic remain much the same as they were fifty or sixty years ago. The Milford Haven route to Waterford has perhaps lost some of its postal importance, because of improved transit by way of Holyhead and Dublin to the south-west of Ireland. But except that Kingstown replaces Howth

and Larne Donaghadee, the various routes between Great Britain and Ireland are practically unchanged.

One might go back a very long way indeed to trace the rise of regular postal communication between Ireland and Great Britain—as far back even as 1729, when a lighthouse was built on the Skerries, six miles west of the extreme point of Holyhead breakwater, by a private gentleman, and the Postmaster-General of the period paid £50 a year to him in consideration of the benefit it afforded to the mail-packets sailing between Holyhead and Dublin. This lighthouse, by the way, was bought by the Trinity House in 1845 for the enormous sum of £445,000.*

The transit was tedious in the extreme. Edgeworth, passing from Edgeworthstown to England, waited at Dublin for more than a week for a fair wind, his eyes fixed on the weathercock. Woodfall, Lord Mornington, and his brother, in crossing from shore to shore, had plenty of time for political conversation, as they were three days at sea. A passenger who took the packet at Holyhead to go to Howth or Dublin on one occasion found himself landed near Carlingford Lough, which is nearly the same thing as though a passenger for the North Wall nowadays was blown by the winds to Greenore.

However, it was not until the legislative Union of the two countries had taken place, in 1801, that

* 'Proceedings of Institute of Civil Engineers,' May 12, 1868 (paper by William Watson, M.A.).

public attention was aroused in earnest. Then the official tongue was loosened. Public Commissioners and Committees of the House of Commons presented no fewer than twenty-four reports on the subject of the Irish mail service within ten years.

It was not all talk. Something came of it, but hardly before the twenties, when money was spent with a lavish hand.

The Channel passage was an almost insoluble problem. How to quicken it was the difficulty. As long as sailing cutters were the order of the day the case seemed hopeless. It is not easy to make way due west if the wind blows steadily in the eye of the east.

The average passage between Holyhead and Dublin had taken about fifteen hours in one direction and twenty in the other. Then, not without grave forebodings from those who knew the Channel, the Post-Office resolved on the use of steam power. Experienced commanders alleged that 'no vessel could perform the winter service but sailing cutters.' Yet, with the boldness and energy which marked Freeling's administration, the department early in the twenties built, by Evans, the steamers *Meteor* and *Royal Sovereign*, one a little over and the other a little under 200 tons burthen, and gave to the famous firm of Boulton and Watt the making of their machinery. Now a full horse-power or more per ship's ton is provided in marine engines; then they were content with less than a third. Such were the earliest postal

steamers—mere cock-boats as they would be deemed now, but yet staunch enough to face a storm in the Irish Sea, or, for that matter, in the Bay of Biscay.

The steamers being put on the station, down went the average duration of passage to $7\frac{1}{2}$ hours. If one voyage was as long as 23 hours, yet another was as short as $5\frac{1}{4}$. Sails were thrown overboard for good.

On land Telford let loose his energy and skill. About £1,000,000 was laid out in improving the highways. The Chester, Bangor, and Holyhead road was taken in hand, and, greater work still, the old highway between Bangor, Corwen, and Shrewsbury was turned into a fine mail-coach road, and its excellences imparted to that between Birmingham, Barnet, and London. Many uncivil things had been said, perhaps justly, of the condition of the highway by Corwen; but a score of years before Telford brought spirit-level and pickaxe to bear upon it, Paterson, no mean authority, had declared it to be 'hard, smooth, level and extremely pleasant, being,' he added, 'passable at all times.' Probably for the transit of his Majesty's mails something better was wanted than a passable roadway. In Ireland a good road was also made to Howth, an hour's drive from Dublin, on the northern curve of the bay. A sum of £300,000 was spent in making a packet harbour at the former place, which is now practically deserted by the shipping.

The mail-coaches on both sides were whipped up to the highest possible pace.

‘The main line of communication,’ wrote the Duke of Richmond to the Treasury in a burst of exultation on February 24, 1834, ‘with Ireland by Holyhead and Dublin has been essentially improved. The mail that leaves London at eight o’clock at night reaches Dublin, under ordinary circumstances of weather, between seven and eight on the second morning. Thirty-two to thirty-six hours,’ added his Grace in a footnote which seems to breathe defiance to all critics, ‘from London to Dublin, 269 miles by land’ [the distance was about to be shortened by 8 or 10 miles, but the Duke does not seem to have been aware of it], ‘and a sea-passage of 70 miles’ [meaning from Holyhead to Dublin], ‘including stoppages.’

For a time Howth flourished as a mail-port. But the year 1834 did not expire without sealing its fate. From faults of construction, the harbour was reported to be rapidly filling up. Two vessels had grounded at the entrance. So on December 13 the mails were landed at Kingstown, and sent for the first time by railway to Dublin; but it was not until the year following that they were sent by rail in both directions. Then of what account were the new harbour of Howth and the well-metalled mail-road to the capital?

As the packet bound westward passed the Kish, the helmsman now steered a straight course west by north a quarter north, or if it was low-water on Burford Bank, he gave a little southing to the compass-card, and, no longer shaping his course for Howth, made for the new, commodious, and secure ‘asylum’ harbour of

Kingstown. But although by this time a regular steamship service was maintained by the Admiralty from Holyhead, and one of less importance from Liverpool, stormy seasons had the same effect on the packets as on the coaches, and the Irish public had sometimes to complain of irregularity.

The importance of punctuality, however, was seen on all hands. The managers of the Dublin and Kingstown Railway kept an engine in steam from half-past five in the morning awaiting the London mails, sometimes so keeping it an entire day, and doing the same at night for the Chester mails; being as eager in the past as in the present to carry the mails up to Dublin with all practicable despatch.

An important factor had now to be reckoned with. The City of Dublin Steam Packet Company appeared on the scene. With this enterprising corporation is closely allied the name of William Watson, who was one of the company's staunchest supporters, and in 1853, at any rate, a managing director. His son is their chairman to-day.

The company had been trading between Dublin and Liverpool since 1823. In 1838 a contract to carry mails to Kingstown was given to them; for the port of Liverpool, desiring to have direct mail communication with Ireland, had been strong enough to induce the Government to make it a packet-station. The Post-Office, however, by this time no longer ran its own packets. The Admiralty, in 1837, had taken them over, and now maintained the packet-stations at

Liverpool, Holyhead, Kingstown, Milford and Waterford, and at Portpatrick and Donaghadee.

The vessels employed, though still mere pigmies compared with the *Ireland* of the present day, were all strong, fair-sized paddle-wheel steamers, as vessels then went, and were manned with a crew of from ten to twenty-seven persons.

The new arrangement was that the Admiralty boats should take the day mail and the City of Dublin Company the night mail. They did so for ten years.

In the year 1836 the road service of the Irish mails in Great Britain left nothing to be desired. Telford had already hung across the Menai Straits that beautiful suspension bridge which still delights the eye, and which, at a distance of less than two miles from Bangor (there is a short cut through Treborth Park), by connecting the Anglesey shore with Carnarvonshire, saved the delay of crossing the tide-way by the broad ferry.

The bridge was opened on January 30, 1826. The London night mail coach, carrying the letters for Ireland, crossed it from Ynys y Moch, in Carnarvonshire, into Anglesey, and was followed, says Mr. Williams in his illustrated guide, by the Bangor Pilot and the London Oxonian. The time, one o'clock in the morning, of the London mail-coach horses setting foot on this bridge is a standard from which may be computed the increase of speed which Telford's genius, and improvements in coaches, ultimately

effected. Ten years afterwards the coach was due there at 8.48 p.m.— $4\frac{1}{4}$ hours earlier.

A similar bridge which spans the tidal river at Conway had quickened the route of the Chester mails, but the main road for London from Holyhead turned off to the south-east at Bangor. It made for Corwen and Shrewsbury, avoiding Chester altogether, and, as I have said, ran almost as true as a line can be drawn on the map through Birmingham and Coventry, direct for Barnet and London. That road, from post-office to post-office, is 259 miles 2 furlongs long; and it is another mile down to the Admiralty pier.

Hurtled through the country at a mean speed of 10 miles 1 furlong an hour, the London night mail for Ireland, which had left St. Martin's-le-Grand on Monday at 8 p.m., was due at the waterside shortly before midnight on Tuesday, and, wind and weather permitting, would arrive on the Irish coast at five or six o'clock on Wednesday morning. In 1830 this coach had got over the ground in 29 hours; now it consumed only 27.

The public had highly approved of the Conway and Bangor suspension bridges—the posts ran quicker, travelling was more convenient. The Post-Office, too, was enchanted; twopence more postage was clapped on letters, a penny for each bridge.

A comparison of the time-bill of about the period of the accession of his late Majesty, with that of the accelerated service of 1836-37, may not be without interest as showing the process of acceleration.

The time of starting from London was the same in both cases :

At	Distance from London.	1830.	1836-7.	Gain.	
	Miles.			Hrs.	Mins.
Towcester	59	2.36 a.m.	2.12 a.m.		24
Birmingham ...	108	7.58 a.m.	7.8 a.m.		50
Shrewsbury ...	152	1.9 p.m.	11.59 a.m.	1	10
Corwen	192	5.43 p.m.	3.57 p.m.	1	40
Holyhead	259	1.17 a.m.	10.55 p.m.	2	22
Time occupied from 8 p.m.		Hrs. Mins. 29 17	Hrs. Mins. 26 55	2	22

The transit between the two capitals occupied about 34 hours.

The London and North-Western Railway, except from Manchester to Liverpool, was as yet inchoate.

In 1837 the tide of change caused by the opening of the Grand Junction Line between Birmingham and Manchester and Liverpool began to flow. The Irish mail-service in England was partly performed by road, partly by rail. It was a transitional period.

In 1838 alterations of importance were numerous. The railway was opened throughout from London to Liverpool, whereupon the Holyhead route practically became obsolete. The bulk of the mails passed to and from Liverpool. Passengers preferring the shorter sea-passage, and not fearing a long coach-ride, still, however, clung to Holyhead. In this state of suspended animation the important Anglesey harbour remained for about ten years.

But brighter days were in store. Robert Stephenson was constructing the Chester and Holyhead

Railway ; Rendel had commenced shooting the rough deposits for the new breakwater. Great gaps, it is true, had to be bridged over before the railway could pass the river Conway and the Straits at Bangor. But the genius which had carried the line around the spurs of Penmaenmawr was not to be baffled by tidal rivers or navigable straits.

Stephenson soon electrified Great George Street, Westminster, and half the land besides. He built a hollow iron beam of angle plates, and hoisting it far above the waterway, right over the tops of the tallest masts of sea-going vessels, flung it from shore to shore, across the Menai Straits, sent the mail-trains through it, and called it the Britannia Tubular Bridge. He did the same at Conway, where, as at Bangor, the Suspension Bridge and the Tube—memorials of the two great engineers, Telford and Stephenson—stand side by side.

The Bangor bridge cost £622,000. Its central span, in which two tubes are placed parallel to each other, measures no less than 460 feet ; two shorter tubes measure each 230 feet. It was so far completed that one line was opened for traffic on March 18, 1850. Both lines were ready for use on October 21.

Then, in May, 1848, the railway opened to London. No longer did the well-laden down night mail coach dash into Shrewsbury and achieve at a canter some of its steep inclines. No longer did timid 'outsides,' and even the hardy box-seat passenger, shut their

eyes as from the heights above they crossed by Telford's aerial bridge the depths below; no longer viewed wearily from the coach-top the sandy wastes which, less lovely than the wooded crests of Bangor, made the last toilsome miles across Anglesey the dreariest stage of all.

In the meantime, the Admiralty had not been idle. With great vigour, they built the famous *Banshee*, a paddle-wheel steamer of 700 tons, and of engines of 350 nominal and 1,555 indicated horse-power. She was a true success. Her name and reputation are stamped on my recollection. They built three other vessels—one very good, the *Llewellyn*, and two not so good, the *Caradoc* and *St. Columba*. The *Banshee* could almost approach in speed her Majesty's yacht, the *Victoria and Albert*, doing on her trial trip 16·1 knots, or 18·5 statute miles, per hour; that is, within two knots of the beautiful *Connaught*, now on the Holyhead station.

In 1850 another great change was wrought, traceable, perhaps, to an opinion expressed by Lord Auckland when at the Admiralty, that the packet-service might be more cheaply done by contractors. A contract was made, on April 9, for ten years, with the City of Dublin Steam Packet Company, whose engagement for carrying the Liverpool mails had naturally ceased in 1848, for a service, twice a day, at an average speed of 12 knots an hour, between Holyhead and Kingstown, for a subsidy of £25,000 a year. The Admiralty relinquished the packet-stations,

and the fleet of twenty packets in her Majesty's service was forthwith dispersed.

The contractors started the Holyhead service with four vessels; they built the *Eblana* and *Prince Arthur*, and they bought the *St. Columba* and *Llewellyn* from the Admiralty. I kept a record of their performances for a year or two. The sea-passage was to occupy about 5 hours, and the total time allowed for the conveyance of the mails between London and Dublin was 14 hours in one direction and 16 in the other.

We were advancing by leaps and bounds. But the public were hard to please. No sooner was the new service set fairly going than complaints arose. The Dublin Chamber of Commerce, always on the *qui vive*, were urgent in their remonstrance. Said they:

'A passenger sailing from Kingstown Harbour at 9 o'clock a.m. by the boats of the Chester and Holyhead Railway Company arrives in London at 11 o'clock p.m. A letter forwarded from Dublin by the mail-packet which sails from Kingstown at 7.30 p.m. on Monday does not arrive in London till 1 o'clock on Tuesday. It is not delivered in the City till between 3 and 4.'

Now, a letter leaving Dublin at 7 p.m. would be delivered in the City of London before 9 a.m. next day.

The *Banshee*, under the Admiralty, taking the month of March, 1850, as a specimen, had performed thirty-eight voyages in an average time of 4 hours

5 minutes. She has, indeed, made so short a passage as 3 hours 37 minutes, and was properly accounted swift. The corresponding month in 1851, when the service was in the contractor's hands, only showed for 30 voyages of the *Eblana* a mean of 4 hours 37 minutes, while out of 62 voyages performed by the *Llewellyn*, the quickest occupied as much as 4 hours 13 minutes. Did the superseded Admiralty repress a genial smile? Perhaps not.

The payment, £25,000 a year, was probably too low. The mails but too often got to Dublin an hour and a half late, and instead of the stipulated average—13 hours 35 minutes (allowing for Dublin time)—being observed, the actual time occupied between London and Kingstown was 15 hours 10 minutes. Worse than all, the passenger accommodation was defective. Ladies were obliged to lie on the floor in such numbers as to render it impossible to move about the overcrowded cabins.

Thus, or in some such words as these, a select committee expressed itself on July 13, 1853. They pronounced the opinion that, notwithstanding the vast and increasing importance of a rapid and efficient communication between England and Ireland, the arrangement of 1850 was inferior to what had previously existed.

This was strong language, but it bore fruit. The great tribune, John Bright, was a member of the committee. He took no part, however, in its deliberations.

On this searching question of how to ensure quick communication with Ireland, guidance was sought amongst the best authorities. The names of the eminent men who gave evidence come down as household words, familiar in the mouths at least of those who have been interested in boats and railways: I. K. Brunel, Captain Mark Huish, Cawson Patrick Roney, John Laird, Admiral Moorsom, J. O. Binger, John Penn, Captain Smithett, Scott Russell, and the leader of the City of Dublin Company, W. Watson.

Stirred up by the vigorous and trenchant report of the Committee, Parliament lost no time in advising itself what to do. For in 1855 it bent its mind on 'Improving the Postal and Passenger Communication between England and Ireland,' and passed into law the 18th and 19th Victoria, cap. 172.

The London and North-Western Railway Company owning the line from London to Chester, the new company which had made the railway from Chester to Holyhead, and the City of Dublin Steam Packet Company from Holyhead to Howth, Kingstown, or Dublin, were to unite and provide a first-rate service. So that there should be no mistake about the sea-service, which was the key of the position, the parties to the new plan were to be jointly empowered 'to purchase, build, contract, navigate, maintain and work; also to charter or hire steamboats'—a free hand in arranging for the Channel passage being essential to success.

Here is the consequent time-table :

Euston, departure	5.0 p.m. and 9 p.m.
Chester „	10.15 p.m. „ 2 a.m.
Holyhead „	12.45 a.m. „ 4.30 a.m.
Kingstown, arrival... ..	5.45 a.m. „ 9.45 a.m.

Thus, a passage from London to Kingstown in 12 hours 45 minutes, and to Dublin in, say, 13 hours 15 minutes, was to be accomplished. The return service was not quite so prompt. It took the heart out of 16 hours :

Kingstown, departure	2.0 p.m. and 7.30 p.m.
Holyhead „	8.24 p.m. „ 2 a.m.
Chester „	11.4 p.m. „ 4.40 a.m.
Euston, arrival	5.10 a.m. „ 11.0 a.m.

It is true there was at first, for a year or two, a service not strictly in agreement with these time-tables ; inasmuch as until the limitation of traffic in the Scotch mail, which began on February 1, 1859, both Scotch and Irish night mails left Euston by a train at 8.45 p.m., and reached Euston together by a train at 4.30 a.m.

But whether the London mails through Holyhead were in to time or not, away from Dublin at eight o'clock in the morning, or at seven o'clock at night, went eleven or twelve well-appointed four-horse coaches, beside other mail-conveyances. The mail-coaches ran at an average speed of about $8\frac{1}{2}$ English miles per hour, the fastest being the Limerick mail, at 9 miles and 4 furlongs, and the slowest the New

Ross mail, at 7 miles and 4 furlongs. The longest ride was to Cork, 160 miles by the direct road *via* Clonmel for the quick coach, which went at the customary pace of $8\frac{1}{2}$ miles an hour, and 3 furlongs more for the slow coach by way of Cashel, which only averaged 7 miles and 7 furlongs in the hour.

But although the longest ride out of Dublin was $160\frac{3}{4}$ miles to Cork, a supplementary service running at reduced speed (8 miles 3 furlongs), but still a four-horse mail-coach, took the traveller 71 miles 6 furlongs further to Bantry. It went through Bandon, Rosscarbery, and Skibbereen. Once, on driving along part of this road, but turning south-west for Schull and Crookhaven, I suggested to the driver that we should halt at the next inn to rest and refresh the horses.

‘Inn!’ said he; ‘there is no inn, your honour, betwixt this and New York.’

It was either at Ballydehob or Schull (the latter, perhaps) that a bit of true Irish politeness (one of many in the course of time) was shown to me. A long drive was in prospect and the clouds hinted rain. So I bade the driver pull up where an umbrella could be bought, having none with me. Said the shop-keeper: ‘Do I understand that you wish to buy an umbrella because the day may turn out wet? If so, here is a good one.’

‘Certainly. Many thanks. How much?’

‘Oh, you can settle on the way back.’

On our return I again inquired the price.

'Give me my umbrella,' was the reply. 'There's nothing to pay. You have not even used it.'

The distance from Skibbereen to destination was 30 miles—the round trip 60—yet the horses came back at 9 miles an hour into Skibbereen without a touch of the whip, so great is the endurance of that magnificent creature, a true-bred Irish horse.

There were curious differences in the rates of payment. For instance, the Enniskillen coach received £1,253, or 8d. the double mile, for travelling 102 miles 3 furlongs, at an average speed of 8 miles 5 furlongs in the hour; while the quicker coach to Galway got little more—£1,293 (in fact, it actually received a lower mileage payment, viz., 6½d. a mile)—for running a greater distance—133 miles—at higher speed, viz., 9 miles an hour.

However, to Dublin, Cork, Derry, Enniskillen, Galway, Limerick, New Ross, Sligo, Waterford, and Wexford, the roads were made merry by the horn of the mail-guard, and even the single day mail coach which took the Belfast mail out of the Holyhead steamer, in rattling along at nearly 9 miles an hour, aroused Drogheda-by-the-Boyne, Dundalk, and Newry-in-the-Hills, with a sense of the lively march of time.

P. Purcell and F. Bourne between them built nearly all the mail-coaches in Ireland, and they followed pretty closely the English model, allowing, as was proper, from roof to floor, an inch and a half more for the superior stature of the Celt. It is probable that Captain Bourne, R.N., who helped to form

the Peninsular Steam Navigation Company (eventually the 'P. and O.') was a relative of the eminent coachbuilder, F. Bourne. If so, contract mail-services in Ireland suggested contract mails to the Peninsula.

But while there were certainly not fewer than thirty four-horse and five pair-horse mail-coaches in Ireland in 1836, there were as many as seventy-nine mail-cars. The greatest speed of the coaches was 10 miles 4 furlongs, the slowest 7 miles, and the mean 8 miles 2 furlongs, per hour. The cars went, as might be expected, slower. The greatest speed was 7 miles 5 furlongs in English miles, the slowest 5 miles 1 furlong, while the mean was 6 miles 3 furlongs, per hour.

When the Irish coaches were still in full operation, a noted mail-guard was McClusky, commonly known as 'Jack.' He was not in the service of the department, but was a contractors' guard, in which capacity he worked from about 1830 to 1865.

With education gained at Maynooth, and with good natural ability, it seems a pity that he took to a humble vocation on the road. McClusky was of medium size, well built, with a cheerful face and manner, and he possessed an ample store of witty anecdotes and wonderful yarns with which he regaled his passengers. Further, he was a skilled cornopean-player, and delighted the travellers with lively airs.

Thanks to Maynooth, he was better informed than the generality of his class, and his manners were

superior. He was naturally very popular with the coach passengers.

Anthony Trollope introduced him into one of his books, and in a letter to Mrs. Morgan John O'Connell related a delicious anecdote of McClusky, with whom he frequently travelled when a surveyor of the Post-Office in Ireland :

‘I remember him well. He was guard on the Dublin and Boyle coach. He and I were great friends. Once on the top of the coach, when I had been vindicating the character of donkeys, he said to me: “A fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind.”’

On another occasion a tourist, travelling by the mail, discovered McClusky's stock of sandwiches, provided as a snack by the way, and ate them whilst the guard was delivering the mails. ‘Where are my sandwiches?’ the robber demanded. The robber smiled. ‘Where,’ roared McClusky, ‘is that packet of poisoned sandwiches for killing off the keeper's cur dogs?’ The robber at once fell ill, afflicted less by the innocent roast beef than by a poisoned conscience.

For many years he travelled with the mail-coach between Dublin, Boyle, and Sligo, but on the opening of the first section of the Midland Great Western Railway his route lay between Mullingar and Sligo. On his retirement from coaching he obtained employment in the left-luggage office at Broadstone terminus, and there he remained up to the time of his death, about fourteen years ago.

The Cork and Waterford coaches from Dublin came off the road, at least as far as Carlow, in 1846; the Cork and Bandon in 1851; the Dublin and Belfast coaches in part in 1844; and in 1852 they practically disappeared.

The cross-Channel service did not long remain as remodelled in 1855. The Government, egged on by public opinion, decided on yet greater things. The Holyhead breakwater was finished. The high authorities—the Post-Office (under Lord Colchester and Sir Rowland Hill) and the Treasury (at the latter Mr. James Wilson, M.P., was Financial Secretary)—laid their heads together and settled the bases of a new and imposing scheme—so new and so good, so far in advance of previous efforts, that in the indenture of January 3, 1859, which gave effect to it, it is styled in quotation marks, ‘The New Irish Postal Service.’

By the improved arrangement, which came into operation on October 1, 1860, the three corporations—the London and North-Western, and Chester and Holyhead Railway Companies, and the City of Dublin Steam Packet Company—bound themselves anew to effect the whole journey between Euston Square and Kingstown in 11 hours as a maximum. So allowing half an hour more for the conveyance of the mails from Kingstown to Dublin, here was the prospect of a clear gain in time of about 2 hours between the capitals.

The railway companies were to run two trains each

way between London and Holyhead, and the packet company were to build four paddle-wheel steamers, each 300 feet long, of 35 feet beam, and 1,700 tons builder's measurement, which were to be fitted with engines of 600 horse-power.

These vessels were estimated to cost £75,100 apiece, and, as experience has shown, can steam even in unfavourable weather upwards of 15 nautical miles in an hour.

The arrangement was to be carried out in two years from the date of the contract. It was done well within the prescribed time. For many years the mails leaving London at 7.30 a.m. and 8.30 p.m., Greenwich time, were delivered at Kingstown at or about 7 a.m. and 6.5 p.m. respectively, Dublin time.

The payment for the land service was fixed at £20,000, in addition to a special subsidy of £30,000 granted to the Chester and Holyhead Railway Company. So the land service stood at £50,000 a year; the payment to the packet company was fixed at £85,900; total, £135,900 a year.

A penalty for delay on the sea services of £1 14s. per minute was prescribed, but as its imposition was made contingent on certain alterations of the piers at Holyhead and Kingstown, the stipulation remained inoperative for many years.

The *Ulster*, *Munster*, *Leinster*, and *Connaught*, built under the contract of 1859, are still running, large and beautiful vessels, which are a sight which tax-

payers of all nationalities and all shades of politics may behold with pleasure as they steam away from or arrive at the Carlisle Pier in Kingstown harbour night and morning, saluting as they pass the guardship which lies at her moorings, and receiving in reply the regulation acknowledgment. They, with the *Ireland*, the latest addition to the station, are names in most men's mouths in Kingstown and Dublin.

But paddles, though they have survived to this day on the Holyhead and Kingstown and Dover and Calais lines, speedily became obsolete for ocean navigation, and the screw-propeller, which it is said, though not originally invented by Mr. Francis Pettit Smith, was first applied successfully to the navigation of ships by him, replaced them. Which was the first private vessel fitted with a screw may be open to doubt, but the first steamer of the royal navy to be so fitted—and that, too, at the time when H.M.S. *Terrible* was in the full glory of her paddles—was beyond question the *Rattler*.

The new service went on for twenty years, when, in Mr. Fawcett's time at the Post-Office, another acceleration was effected. Mr. Childers was the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Mr. Leonard Courtney the Financial Secretary. Mr. Fawcett took me with him to the Treasury, and there were several discussions. At length, a new contract was made, which began October 1, 1883. It separated the partnership which had hitherto existed, and provided for a quickened transit both by sea and land under payments amounting

to £141,500 a year. Still, there seemed the possibility of further improvement, and on October 1, 1885, we made the latest change, when a further gain in time was effected in both directions. The cost then stood at £147,000 a year. The mail is now due at Kingstown Pier at 6.37 a.m., *i.e.*, in 10 hours 7 minutes from Euston Square. It reaches Dublin about 20 minutes later. Say from post-office to post-office the transit is effected in 11 hours. That is just the estimate of the Select Committee of 1858.

Once—in 1871, I think—it was my lot to experience the sensation of what ‘Breakers ahead!’ might have meant in the old sailing days, or in stormy weather even in a steamer. My work being done in Ireland, I was returning to St. Martin’s-le-Grand, when midway between the Hill of Howth and Holyhead a thick sea-fog came on. We crept ahead at reduced speed, and after a time, when it was reckoned we were nearing Anglesey, the captain, chief officers, and look-out were clustered forward, striving to discern through the fog over the starboard quarter the loom of the Holyhead Mountain, and so get their true bearings. Just then I happened to be on the promenade deck, and saw, looking a trifle to port, a long low line of frothy white waves. A young officer was within reach; I ran to him, pointing to the surf. Without calling the captain or pausing a moment, he darted to the speaking-tube of the engine-room, and sang out lustily to ‘stop her and go full speed astern.’ My recollection is that the way of the ship was arrested and she began to go

backwards, just as the stem was apparently about to touch the reef. Then the fog lifted, and Holyhead Mountain—at any rate, the South Stack—instead of being to the right hand, was in full view on the left. In the fog, and at low speed, strong currents must have drifted the vessel a little out of her course to the southward.

At least, that was my theory, and as I said nothing about the matter, nor probably did the officers or crew, the owners never had the opportunity of presenting me with the gold chronometer, or at any rate free pass or letter of thanks, which I had surely earned. At all events, that was my nearest approach to shipwreck.

Meanwhile the reader may care to see in detail how the service was arranged when my term of office came to an end.

TIME-BILL OF THE IRISH DOWN NIGHT MAIL.

The Right Honourable ARNOLD MORLEY, M.P., Postmaster-General.
From LONDON to KINGSTOWN, 1893.

This Time-Bill will be filled up by the Travelling Sorters on duty between London and Holyhead, and by the Officer in charge of the Mails on board the Packet. An Official Watch (to be carried throughout between London and Kingstown) will be supplied for the use of these Officers; and in order to prevent, as far as possible, dispute as to the Time, the Travelling Clerk on duty from London to Holyhead should, immediately before the departure of the Train from Euston Station, compare the Post-Office Watch with the Railway Guard's Watch, and record the exact difference of Time at the moment of comparison.

H. M. S.

Post-Office Watch, No. * than Railway Guard's Watch.
(*Here write Slower or Faster, as the case may be.)

Remarks as to Delays, etc.	Proper Time (London Time).	Actual Time (London Time).	This Column to be left blank.
<i>London and North-Western Railway. City of Dublin Steam Packet Company.</i>	Despatched from the General Post-Office, London, the of 189 , ...at	P.M. 7 50	H. M. S.
	{ Watch, No.		
	{ Received safe by at		
	Last Van arrived at the Station at	8 9	
	Last Bag placed in Train at		
	Despatched from the Euston Railway Station at	8 20	
	Bletchley (Apparatus)(9 20)		
	Arrived at Rugby at	10 4	
	Off at at	10 8	
	Tamworth (Apparatus)(10 42)		
	Arrived at Stafford at	11 13	
	Off at at	11 15	
	„ Crewe at	11 48	
	Special Mail from London arrived at	11 54	
	Off at at	A.M. 12 0	
	Arrived at Chester at	12 28	
	Off at at	12 38	
	Rhyl (Apparatus)(1 17)		
	Arrived at Holyhead Ticket Platform at	2 27	
	Arrived at end of Pier at	2 35	
	Last Bag out of Train at		
	Last Bag on board the Packet at		
	Packet sailed at		
	Arrived at Kingstown (Packet touched Pier) at	Not later than 6 37 A.M.	
	Communication by Gangway estab- lished at		
	Last Bag out of Packet at		

F. E. BAINES, Inspector-General of Mails.

Concurrently with the acceleration of the London services of 1883, the inland mail-trains in Ireland running in connection were also accelerated, so that the general result within my own experience is this :

In 1854, a letter must have been posted early in the day in London or Dublin if it were intended to obtain an early delivery in the other city next morning. Now it obtains an early delivery if posted in time for the ordinary night mail.

In the same year, a letter despatched from London to Cork or Belfast by the night mail of Monday would not have been delivered until Wednesday morning. Now if letters be despatched from London to Belfast and Cork by the night of Monday, they reach Belfast soon after nine, and Cork by about eleven o'clock on Tuesday morning. Galway benefited proportionately ; the west had a slice of the good things granted north and south, and the Maiden City was not neglected.

Such is the history of one of the finest services which the Post-Office can boast of, and which in its branches to Belfast, Londonderry, Cork, and elsewhere, admits of a letter posted before luncheon at Penzance, or after it in Brighton, being delivered in distant parts of Ireland about breakfast-time next day.

The Channel passage, as I have said, has ever been a difficult question in the Irish mail-service. Punctuality is the essence of efficiency : not an embarrassing earliness (to coin a word) one day, and an exasperating lateness the next. Yet, to get across in 4 hours in all

Next Bianconi went to Waterford ; then to a corner shop in Clonmel. As he moved on, so his income improved. At length he was able to start a car from Clonmel to Cahir, and then unchecked prosperity followed. His first purchase was a jaunting-car for six passengers. But although he could have bought a splendid horse for from £10 to £20 (so abundant were first-rate horses in Ireland after the peace), he had not money enough to do so. He purchased two bad horses for less price than a good one would have cost, and started his car. But he found that two horses, even bad ones, would draw more than six people, so he lengthened his car a bit and carried eight. Finally, as he bought better horses, he added yet to the car and took ten passengers. Then he went ahead and acquired horses freely, at times paying £30 for a bad steed, at others £5 for a good one.

How he created traffic by running a second car at lower fares, in active competition with himself, and how the light-hearted Irish people, enjoying the fun and not suspecting the joke, filled up both cars at remunerative fares, is matter of history.

How Bianconi became a large mail contractor, built his own cars at Clonmel, and kept on adding to their length until he carried sixteen passengers in a single conveyance, besides the driver, is also matter of history.

But what is not generally known is that, in 1838, this poor Italian, having no one to thank but his own

clever, shrewd, indomitable self, had established ninety-two vehicles, carrying from four to twenty persons apiece, on forty-five routes, and horsed them over an aggregate daily distance of 3,800 miles.

Bianconi from the earliest moment hit on the sure road to success,—his fares were moderate, and he studied the travellers' safety and comfort. No detail was too small to escape his notice. The simple expedient of a wooden rack under the cushions kept them from being soaked upwards in wet weather, and stout aprons sheltered his passengers' knees from rain and snow.

The managers of the great railroads of the three kingdoms were long in finding out that, by providing comfortable carriages, quick trains, and cheap fares for third-class passengers, they had hit on the true vein of prosperous management. They should earlier have taken a leaf from the poor Italian's book.

With one at least of Bianconi's tastes, perhaps his chief amusement, I have myself much sympathy—the examination of the coaching way-bills. His house was littered with way-bills; the floor of any closed carriage he travelled in lay ankle deep in them. I wish I had a score before me at this moment.

They gave him a perfect insight into the working of his services—of the difficulties, the successes, the failures; told him of time lost here, and traffic gained there; of horses and men in good order, or going to the bad. One secret of his prosperity lay in the fact that the master's eye was as searchingly used in the

. . .

agency at Belmullet, 201 miles north-west of Dublin, as in the stables at Clonmel, a hundred miles or more to the south of it.

‘A handsome man,’ wrote Mr. Hayes, ‘with a fine large head, very bright, sparkling eyes, and a deep florid complexion. Almost to the last he was as active, energetic, and impulsive as when his black hair curled all over his head.’

A letter lies before me from a former colleague in Ireland, whose duties continually brought him in contact with the Italian :

‘I had frequent opportunities of seeing Bianconi during the early years of my Dublin service. Indeed, I stayed at Longfield, his place near Cashel, on a short visit, and had then the pleasure of making the acquaintance of his pretty, graceful, and accomplished daughter.

‘Bianconi, as I knew him, was short and plump, with a round head, fine expansive forehead, curly gray hair, and merry, soft, yet piercing eyes. He was very fond of jokes, and was full of funny anecdotes, at which he laughed quite as heartily as did those who listened to him. But although his usual manner was playful—natural or assumed—he was an exceedingly shrewd man, possessed of strong common-sense; and his conversation, when serious, was most interesting and instructive, from the intimate knowledge he had of Ireland in all its phases, and acquaintance with many of the principal people of the country. He had the not uncommon failing of being vain of his big

acquaintances ; but he was no less proud of having been the architect of his own fortune. He told me how, in his boyish days, he had wandered over the country, selling penny pictures and other small articles ; that his practice, when moving from one place to another, was to *run* from milestone to milestone, resting at each ; that when so resting he pitied the many wayfarers who toiled wearily along on foot ; that he determined, if ever he should have the means, to start a public road conveyance ; that for years, even after his circumstances had improved, he forgot this determination, but that the idea eventually recurred to him, and he carried it out, at first on a very small scale, but in the end on the large scale which everyone knows of. He was kind-hearted and charitable, and did much good. He had a son, who died in his prime. He was very proud of a mausoleum he had erected at Longfield, and there no doubt he now lies.'

Out of ninety cars and two coaches, thirty-six carried the mails. In short, Bianconi's was a mail and day car establishment. He ran a coach at an average speed of 10 miles an hour from Limerick to Galway, and was, in the South and West of Ireland in the middle of this century, what Palmer was to the West of England at the close of the last one.

Similarly as regards Scotland, equally persistent, though less heroic, efforts have converted a slow course of post to and from London into a swift one.

At the period when this narrative begins, Caledonia was approached chiefly by two routes, by Berwick

from York, and by Carlisle from Leeds and Preston. Of course, Edinburgh and Glasgow, Perth, Aberdeen, and Inverness, were the points made for.

One London and Edinburgh mail-coach went *via* York, leaving London at 8 p.m. It took the road by Waltham Cross and Stamford; was at Grantham at 8 a.m. next day; stopped there 40 minutes, spent another 40 minutes at York, and reached Edinburgh at 4.43 p.m. on the third day, thus covering 399 miles 4 furlongs in 44 hours and 43 minutes. Its pace was 9 miles an hour exactly, including stops.

The Edinburgh coach which went by Wetherby also took the Waltham Cross road. It must have been close on the heels of the York coach, as it was due at Grantham at 8.5 a.m. next day, and at Wetherby (191 miles from London) at 5.6 p.m., thus taking 21 hours 6 minutes for the first half of the journey. The speed was just the same as that of the other coach—viz., an even 9 miles an hour, including stoppages. This London coach was driven no further north than Wetherby, but after an interval of 1 hour and 20 minutes away went a fresh coach (6.26 p.m.) for Edinburgh, *via* Newcastle-on-Tyne. It was at Belford at 8.37 a.m. next day, stopped there 40 minutes, and rattled along Waterloo Place in Edinburgh at 5.14 p.m.; the second journey of 201 miles thus occupied a day all but 1 hour and 14 minutes, or together 45 hours 14 minutes. Again the speed was 9 miles an hour.

For London passengers there was not much to choose between the two; one got in about half an hour

sooner than the other—that was all. The precise object in view in running two mail-coaches from London to Edinburgh, on nearly the same roads, is forgotten; but at about the time of the accession of King William IV., and during his Majesty's reign, some important changes were made. The coach due at 4.43 p.m. was made to arrive at 3.30 p.m., and a currie post was put on, *viâ* Wooler, to and from Morpeth and Edinburgh (92½ miles), which outstripped the coach by about 2 hours. It was due at Edinburgh at 1.40 p.m., and often arrived, when the coach ran to time, at 1.30. But the coach rarely did run to time. It usually left St. Martin's-le-Grand 10 or 15 minutes, sometimes even half an hour, late; and so, although it was due at York at 5.36 p.m., and Morpeth at 4.16 a.m., it constantly arrived at least as much behind time as at starting.

Then a further change was made. The Wetherby-Edinburgh coach was struck off the road; the Carlisle and Glasgow mails from London were no longer sent by Leeds, but were transferred to a Wetherby-Glasgow coach, which, turning off westward at Boroughbridge, broke into the Penrith road, and got to Carlisle at 4.17 a.m., instead of at 6.7 a.m. by Leeds. The great Yorkshire town had a coach through Higham Ferrers and Barnsley to itself.

Simultaneously the Edinburgh mail by York was whipped up; an hour or more was gained, and it got to Edinburgh at 2.23 p.m. The coach never improved on that acceleration.

There was yet another route to the border. The Manchester coach, which ran through Barnet and Derby, was continued by second coach to Carlisle, and by a third to Portpatrick, and carried the North of Ireland mails. Leaving London at 8 p.m., it was at Manchester (187 miles) at three o'clock in the afternoon of the second day, and at Carlisle at 4.53 on the morning of the third day, only 7 minutes, by the way, before the coaches for Glasgow and Edinburgh were timed to leave, so that one would suppose that letters from Lancashire for Scotland generally must more than once have missed the junction. It passed through Gretna Green at 6.35 a.m.—not too early, probably, for the blacksmith.

And while the 35 miles 5 furlongs from Carlisle to Dumfries were cantered over at 9 miles an hour by four horses, there was a sad come-down for the Portpatrick mail from the south as soon as Dumfries was past. A pair-horse coach struggled through Kirkcudbrightshire at 7 miles 4 furlongs an hour; and if for the 85 miles it was paid 5d. a mile, or £646 a year in all, it certainly got as much as was fair.

Like the arrival of the mail by horse-post or mail-gig at Westbury in Wiltshire, so that of the mail-coach at corners of Great Britain so remote as Portpatrick or Stranraer was always an event of interest, and sometimes of keen expectation.

I am told to-day that a banker in Stranraer remembers a crowd in 1832 awaiting at the end of the town news of Lord John Russell's Reform

Bill, which was passed, as will be remembered, early in June. As the coach hove in sight, with colours flying, the lads of the town, without awaiting its actual arrival, ran up the streets, crying, 'The Bill has passed! the Bill has passed!'

About the time, too, that the younger Mr. Weller was paying marked attentions to Mary, the pretty housemaid at Mr. Nupkins', the guard of this same coach was enamoured of a fair creature who resided on the mail-road between Stranraer and Portpatrick. The coach passed her abode twice daily. When nearing it, the lover gallantly blew the horn loud and long; the considerate coachman 'slowed down' the horses; the devoted guard sprang to the ground, publicly saluted the object of his affections, and, amidst general plaudits and the sympathy and approval of passengers of his own sex, nimbly regaining his perch and charge of the mail-bags, blew a farewell blast.

It was either on this coach or that which ran to Ayr that the guard was provided with one of the few key bugles allowed on the royal mails, in lieu of, or in supplement to, the long straight horns, such as are still used on the parcel coaches.

The Carlisle coach was due at Portpatrick at 22 minutes past 9 at night. In this case the journey of 424 miles from London to the Irish Sea occupied a fraction more than two days and an hour. From Glasgow to Portpatrick with the Irish mail was a distance through Ayrshire of 94 miles. A pair of

horses drew the coach at $8\frac{1}{2}$ miles an hour. The mails for Ireland passed on by packet to Donaghadee.

Competition at one time raged furiously on some of the Scotch coach-lines. Between Ayr and Wigton and Dumfries the late Mr. Robert MacMurtrie, of Ayr, was the contractor for carrying the mails. A rival started up who offered lower terms all round, whereon Mr. MacMurtrie took the mails for nothing, and carried passengers at merely nominal fares. The unprofitable strife went on for eighteen months, when the interloper, exhausted, quitted the field. Not long after this two English railway companies followed suit, throwing away the receipts of the Great Exhibition traffic of 1851 by carrying passengers to and from London at less than cost price, one company actually paying away in tolls for right of way more than it collected in passengers' fares. Such are some of the vagaries of human nature, whether in individuals or corporate bodies, when reason and moderation are cast aside, and the bit is taken between the teeth.

So, at the time of her Majesty's accession, a letter which left London at eight o'clock on Monday night was due at Berwick, on the border, at 8.17 on Wednesday morning, and at Edinburgh at 2.23 in the afternoon; while a letter for Glasgow, despatched at the same hour, would pass through Carlisle at 4.17 a.m., and reach Glasgow at 2 p.m.

The journey northward is easily traceable. At nine o'clock at night the coach from Edinburgh was



at Perth; at 2.23 in the morning at Montrose, and at 6.22 at Aberdeen; at three o'clock in the afternoon at Elgin, and at 6 minutes past 8 at Inverness. This was Thursday.

At 3.15 next morning it was on the south side of Meikle Ferry, and, with good luck, before 4 it was north of it. Dornoch, Golspie, and Helmsdale and the Ord of Caithness were passed, and on Friday the glimmering lights of the schooners lying off Scrabster, one perhaps waiting for the mail for the Orkneys, came into view, and the mail-coach drew up its weary steeds at Thurso Post-Office at six o'clock at night. So the toilsome journey from St. Martin's-le-Grand to Thurso—783 miles—was achieved in 3 days and 22 hours. Four hours later the return mail left for Edinburgh and London.

Some further particulars of the Carlisle and other four-horse coaches which in 1836 ran in Scotland in continuation of the London mail are given below:

Coach.	Rate and Speed per hour.		Coach.	Rate and Speed per hour.	
	Miles.	Furl.		Miles.	Furl.
Aberdeen to Inverness	8	3	Edinburgh to Aberdeen	9	5
Berwick to Edinburgh	9	5	Edinburgh to Glasgow, <i>via</i> Bathgate	9	6
Carlisle to Edinburgh	9	2	Edinburgh to Stirling	8	4
Carlisle to Glasgow	10	4	Glasgow to Perth...	8	5
A second mail-coach ran between these points.			Perth to Inverness	8	5

Greatest speed travelled by a mail-coach, 10 miles



4 furlongs per hour; slowest, 7 miles. Average, 8 miles 2 furlongs per hour.

The old mail-coach route from Perth to Inverness was often blocked. On one occasion the coach was upset at Dalwhinnie, and the guard (John Stewart) fatally injured. His widow was allowed a pension.

The Grand Junction, the North Union, the Lancaster and Carlisle, and the Caledonian Railways bit by bit usurped the north-west road; similarly the Midland pushed on to Normanton and Leeds. The York and North Midland, to York, Newcastle, and Berwick, joined the North British and Midland Companies' tracks together, and the iron way was made continuous from Euston Square to the Border and far away beyond it. Yet the downfall of the coaching interest in Scotland was long delayed.

The railway line between Berwick and Edinburgh, which was completed in 1846, was not fully connected with Newcastle and York until 1848, nor were the Caledonian Railway trains able to run to Perth before the latter year. In short, the Scotch coaches continued on the road at least ten years later than the English coaches, and, of course, to the Far North they held on until the completion of the Highland railway some years afterwards. But, attacked on both flanks, they shortened their journeys by degrees until the bitter end. It was not until July 5, 1847, that the last mail-coach, bound for Berwick and Edinburgh, left Newcastle-on-Tyne. Then, sorrowful to all who saw it, the Union-jack was borne aloft flying half-mast high.

NOU



In fact, if a general date, say 110 years ago, be assigned to the commencement of Palmer's wise scheme for the improvement of mail-coaches, the very hour—nay, the exact minute—can be recorded of the actual end of the mail-coach system in Great Britain. At 4.45 in the morning, on Saturday, August 1, 1874, the London night mail by coach across the Ord of Caithness arrived for the last time at Thurso.

The Highland Railway had long been creeping northwards from Inverness. It had opened its main line to Wick; now it threw out to Thurso a spur from Georgemass. As the dust-covered coach delivered the bags at the door of the post-office, the old order changed. The final road-bags went in at a quarter to 5, and at 10 minutes past 5 the first railway-bags came out.

That was the end of the working of the longest mail-coach ride out of London, which in 1836, following rather a circuitous route from St. Martin's-le-Grand, traversed 783 miles, gave employment to nearly 800 horses, and performed the whole distance from post-office to post-office in 3 days and 22 hours.

It maintained its reputation to the last: had on the box a smart coachman, dressed in real gray sealskin, as befitted those high latitudes; ran good cattle, and kept true time. It came into Thurso with a 'unicorn' team of splendid half-breds (a cross between a cob, or a cart-horse, and a thorough-bred), perhaps resembling those which Chaplin stabled at Hounslow and described as 'half-bloods.' They were powerful

creatures, swift, and of good courage and endurance. They went at so slashing a pace when allowed to trot—knowing, as experienced coach-horses, exactly what they had to do, and desiring to get it promptly over and done with—that it was usual, when the roads were in good order, to reduce them to a walk for a mile or two midway, so as not to overshoot the time-bill.

Once, an onlooker tells me, a coachman mounted the box at Thurso in a state of health which obviously rendered him unfit for duty. He was remonstrated with, but in vain. He was there, and would take the coach to Wick. He did so, but on arrival had to be assisted from the box, and died the same day.

One mail-guard of the Thurso coach had the habit of falling asleep upon his perch, and from thence tumbling to the road. This occurred frequently; sometimes the coach proceeded for several miles before the driver became aware that he was deficient of a guard. But his comrade had seen long service with the army, and, being accustomed to hard knocks, was none the worse for his involuntary falls.

The coach many years ago was not always lucky in the skill of its drivers, but the horses made up for every deficiency. 'Freedom from accident,' an experienced correspondent of mine, who, living on the spot, had the coach constantly in view, is of opinion, 'may be safely set down to the credit of the team; for the horses knew perfectly well what they had to do, the pace they were required to travel at, and also, of course, better than the men, they knew their

halting-point. Should any conveyance by chance meet them, the coach generally kept a good share of the fair-way, leaving the other party to take precautions.' Surely a breed so sagacious, which does honour to Caledonia, ought to be preserved.

Still, as I write, one solitary coach recalls the past. It runs under contract, carrying what mails and parcels can be sent by it, from Kingussie, in the Highlands, to Fort William, close by the Caledonian Canal. But that, too, is doomed. The West Highland Railway is at the gates of the mail-road, and soon 'Lochaber' (the Kinlochs) will know the prancing steeds of the Kingussie coach 'no more.' Yet the stage from Thurso to Tongue—not, indeed, a mail-coach—runs as it did on June 10, 1836, when Sir Edward Lees, Mr. Abbott's predecessor in Edinburgh, described it as 'a carriage on four wheels, drawn by two horses, capable of carrying four passengers, but which was not a stage-coach, nor did it carry a guard.'

When Rowland Hill was in power he lost no chance of accelerating the mails. Eventually the Great Northern Railway carried the London and Edinburgh mail, and the London and North-Western and Caledonian companies the London and Liverpool and Glasgow and other mails. So it is arranged at this moment, as I intend to explain in a subsequent chapter.

But the electric telegraph was to outstrip all efforts—at least, in point of mere speed. An anecdote which illustrates what, after all, requires no proof occurs to me. The London and Edinburgh coach, *riâ* York,

as shown, was allowed, when at its best, 42 hours 25 minutes for the 397 miles 3 furlongs between St. Martin's-le-Grand and the old post-office in Waterloo Place—say the course of post was five days. In 1798 the coach had not worked up to this pitch of perfection. 'It was,' says Mr. Harris, 'two days and three nights on the road;' so replies to letters would be looked for in about a week. A few years after the transfer of the telegraphs to the State, a literary man called on me at the Post-Office on some official business. In course of conversation, he mentioned that he had been engaged on a work which treated of a period (that just mentioned) when it took seven days to get by post a letter to Edinburgh and an answer back. It occurred to me to take him into the telegraph galleries, to see if we could not get a message through to Edinburgh and an answer back in seven *seconds*.

The Edinburgh circuits were engaged, but a Dundee or Aberdeen wire was free. This was the message: 'How weather?' and this the answer: 'Fine.' The time occupied, according to my recollection, was nearer five seconds than seven. Perhaps the clerks at both ends cut the signals short, and 'Hw zm?' and 'Fn' ('How is the weather?' 'Fine') did both for message and reply. At any rate, so far as the mere exchange of intelligent ideas went, we did in the nineteenth century, in a given number of seconds, that which in the eighteenth century had required as many days.

NOU

CHAPTER IV.

PENNY POSTAGE.

ON January 10, 1840, a Warwickshire schoolmaster, born in 1795 at Kidderminster, in the county of Worcester, took the town—one might almost say the world—by storm.

The speech from the Throne in August, 1839, had contained words to the effect that it had been with satisfaction that her Majesty the Queen had given her consent to a reduction of the rates of postage. In August, 1838, the rates, with the exception of a change which had been recently made from 4d. to 2d. on 'single' letters for distances not exceeding 8 miles, had continued the same since 1812 for Great Britain, and since 1814 for Ireland. They advanced from 2d. for 8 miles and 4d. for 15 miles, by steps to 1s. for 300 miles, and 1d. for every additional 100 miles or part of 100 miles. In Scotland, letters, when conveyed by mail-coaches only, were subject to an additional charge of a halfpenny. Letters passing between Great Britain



and Ireland were liable to the rates of postage charged in Great Britain (in Ireland, after the initial charge of 2d., the scale for inland letters was 1d. lower than in England), but there was a Channel rate, with some other special charges.

Rowland, the third son of Thomas Wright Hill and Sarah, his wife, had with his own bow and spear accomplished a triumph. He had brought to the ground, as his quarry, the high rates of postage which hampered trade and social life; he had made clear their direct evils and attendant abuses, and had gained the consent of Parliament and the country to the amount of charge on all inland letters not exceeding half an ounce in weight thenceforth being uniformly fixed at a penny.

It was in 1835 that Rowland Hill's thoughts had first turned in earnest to the Post-Office. In that year there occurred an event full of comfort to reformers who have to consider the public purse—a large surplus of general revenue. Here was the tempting opportunity of successfully suggesting a beneficial reduction of postage duties, though, strange paradox, the scheme which was prepared in view of a surplus of revenue came (to anticipate) to be legalized when the income of the country fell short of the expenditure. Lord Melbourne thought that the difference either way of a few hundred thousand pounds in an income of £48,000,000 was of comparatively little moment. He said, in effect, that there was a general concurrence of all parties in



favour of the plan, and, as Sir Arthur Blackwood remarked to me one day, a big till to draw upon.

As a first step after exhaustive examination of his subject, Rowland Hill wrote an effective pamphlet which soon wrought conviction in the minds of all sensible men. His reasoning, according to Leigh Hunt, carried all along with it 'as smoothly as wheel on railroad.' He set forth the public gain to be expected from cheap and frequent postal conveyance; he declared that the object of his postal reform was not to increase the political power of this or that party, but to benefit all sects in politics and religion, and all classes, from the highest to the lowest. He claimed for his plan an increased energy to trade, and the removal of temptations to fraud, and that by means of it an important step would be taken in general education.

Lord Ashburton, looking at the postage question generally, had always thought it a very bad means of raising revenue. 'I think it,' said he, 'one of the worst of our taxes.' Dr. Dionysius Lardner regarded a tax on correspondence as he would a tax upon speech; letters were a mode of speaking and hearing at a distance.

In recent years Mr. Henry Fawcett (himself a professor of political economy) told me, speaking of postage rates, that he looked on needlessly high postage as a tax on education, which tax he considered to be the worst of all taxes. Most people will concur in this opinion.

Many men of eminence besides the gifted professor of political economy and those already mentioned have held the same views. Mr. Jones Lloyd, the famous banker, afterwards Lord Overstone, thought that if there were 'any one subject which ought not to have been selected as a subject of taxation, it was that of intercommunication by post.'

The Government had Mr. Hill's paper before them in 1837. It was referred to a Select Committee of the House of Commons. Of this Committee Mr. Robert Wallace, member for Greenock, was made chairman, and it is remarkable that a member of it, Mr. Villiers, who sat for Wolverhampton, is in the House to this day. Mr. Warburton was another member, and a helpful friend.

Lieutenant-Colonel Maberly was then the permanent head of the Post-Office. He had not been long installed; but he had mastered the methods of postal work as then pursued, and he was heartily opposed to penny postage. The same roof covered the Secretary and the Clerk who was to follow his successor. Colonel Maberly received as compensation for loss of house-room, coals and candles (he had never had them, by the way, so one ought to say in lieu of those perquisites) £400 a year; the clerk, Mr. John Tilley, then the first junior, for loss of fees, £11 17s. 6d. The Colonel received as salary £1,500 a year; Mr. Tilley £180.

The pruning-hook had been applied to secretarial remuneration when Colonel Maberly took up office.

The salary of his predecessor, Sir Francis Freeling, had been only £500 a year. But that was justly deemed inadequate pay for a man in his position, and especially for a public servant conspicuous for ability and devotion to duty. Sundry allowances were accordingly added to the bare stipend, which brought up his actual remuneration to £4,165 6s. 4d. per annum.

Revisions of establishments in the Post-Office are always going on. There was one of the Inland Office in 1834. The Postmaster-General, in framing it, abolished a very old allowance of £10 a year made to a certain number of clerks. It was originally granted for the loss of a room at the old Post-Office in Lombard Street. The allowance was of so ancient a date that some of the oldest officers in receipt of it had never had a room.

What, however, was sauce for the goose was by no means such for the gander. Two years later Colonel Maberly was brought into the office. The Earl of Lichfield took no thought of the wise precedent set by the Duke of Richmond, perhaps was never told of it. He readjusted the actual salary, it is true, fixing it at £1,500 instead of £500, but the £400 a year in lieu of house-room he maintained for a reason hard to explain. The Colonel had never had house-room. As well might he be granted £400 a year in lieu of garden and paddock.

However far behind the front rank of progress the Post-Office may have been before it felt the full effect

of the Reformers' vivifying influence, there were not wanting in the Legislature those who rightly appreciated the importance of good management at St. Martin's-le-Grand.

For upon such management and the regulation of the rates of postage depended 'in a great measure,' said a Select Committee of the House of Commons, 'the entire correspondence of the country; and in that correspondence is involved whatever affects, interests, or agitates mankind: private interests, public interests; family, kindred, friends; commercial business, professional business; literature, science, art, law, politics, education, morals, religion. Every rank and class has an interest—more or less immediate—in the safe, speedy and economical transmission of Post-Office communications.'

It was therefore a wide field on which Mr. Hill, fresh from the shires of Worcester and Warwick, from the towns of Kidderminster and Birmingham, had entered.

It was not merely the postage for 'single' letters which needed reform. There were double and multiple letters, the principle of rating for such letters being as follows :

All letters weighing less than an ounce were charged, if consisting of one piece of paper, single postage; of two pieces, double; of three or more pieces, triple postage. Weight sent up the price alarmingly—a letter weighing $1\frac{1}{4}$ ounces cost quadruple postage; one of $1\frac{1}{2}$ ounces, quintuple postage,

and so on. On a triple letter from Liverpool for Barnet the postwoman's demand was, 'Letter, two and nine.'

The estimated number of articles passing through the post in a year was as follows :

Letters, 77,500,000; franks, 7,000,000; newspapers, 44,500,000. Grand total, 129,000,000.

The average produce per letter is not easily stated in a clear and comprehensive form. To ascertain the true produce of the several classes of letters was obviously of much consequence. The Select Committee of 1838 gave the matter much consideration, and if a choice be made of two only of the results which they arrived at, their conclusions would be quite clear. They recorded (1) that the average postage on all letters, foreign as well as inland, was about 7d., and (2) that the average of all letters, exclusive of foreign, was 6½d.

This plain language, however, was qualified by two additional statements to the effect that (3), including the foreign letters, and reckoning all double and triple letters as single, the average was 9½d., and that (4) the average of general post letters alone (*i.e.*, excluding local letters) was 8½d. On the whole, it seems safest to take 7d. as the usual produce of a letter in 1837-8. When penny postage came, 1½d. was found to be the average.

Now, seeing that the Earl of Lichfield, as Postmaster-General, had shown that by dividing the expenditure of the Post-Office by the number of letters passing through it the cost (not for conveyance

only, but for management also) of each letter worked out to not more than 2½d., it can be understood how a profit of £1,658,479 was netted from a gross receipt of only £2,839,738, and that, too, derived from relatively so small a number as 77,500,000 letters. Two conclusions might be drawn: first, that the postage was unduly high; secondly, that an insufficient sum was expended in improving postal processes.

Before the Committee of 1837-8, Rowland Hill was bent on establishing these two propositions and others, and the Post-Office officials were certainly no match for him. Colonel Maberly had been in office barely two years. He had not been confronted with his new duties long enough to solve all the problems which they presented. Sir Francis Freeling, the great Secretary of the Georgian era, was no more. How he would have comported himself towards penny postage is an interesting speculation. He had strong prepossessions, it is true, but he was a man of great intelligence. The Earl of Lichfield could do little more than speak from the returns which his officials laid before him.

Rowland Hill, on the other hand, not only brought a trained intelligence to bear upon the general question, but an ardent thirst for reform; and a special capacity for mastering the lessons taught by the most complicated statistics inspired him with new and original ideas, and armed him with power to confute every attack on his calculations.

But, as regards returns, a marked feature of postal administration at this critical period was the extreme difficulty of obtaining, not merely intelligible and accurate returns, but any returns at all. Reforms authorized by the Treasury conditionally on particulars being furnished were long suspended because the schedules of such, although duly ordered, were but slowly framed. Probably it was not inertness which provoked delay, but the difficulty of deciding what was wanted and how to get it. The complicated regulations of the Post-Office greatly hindered the preparation of clear and explicit statements, and absolute accuracy was hard to realize. For example, the Postmaster-General sought to show how the cost of conveyance increased with distance, and how much greater was such cost than Hill's estimates. The figures Lord Lichfield adduced went to establish, if anything, the converse; at any rate, they brought out the fact that a letter from London to Louth, a distance of 155 miles, cost 1·235d., say 1½d.; but from London to Edinburgh, a distance of 399 miles 6 furlongs, only ·774d., say ¾d. Double the distance was covered for scarcely more than half the money.

But Lord Lichfield's advisers had (of course, unintentionally) misled him. He stated that the cost of a mail-coach trip from London to Edinburgh was £5. A post-office return, procured by Mr. Wallace, M.P., put it at £3 19s. 7¾d., which was to a certain extent correct. It was, moreover, shown that the reduced sum included a charge of £1 which really

had nothing to do with the matter, and that the true cost was not £5, but £2 19s. 7½d.

The committee soon brushed aside fallacies. 'It is not a matter of inference,' said they, 'but a matter of fact, that the expense to the Post-Office is practically the same whether a letter goes from London to Barnet, or from London to Edinburgh.'

That opinion settled the question of uniformity of charge. My fellow-townsmen may boast that the name of their town was thus associated with the most effective argument adduced in favour of this radical change. If Rowland Hill was the father of penny postage, the Committee of 1838 certainly stood sponsors for the beneficent infant. Mr. Wallace, the chairman, Mr. Villiers, and Mr. Warburton were solid as rocks in their favourable opinion of his scheme.

There were not wanting men of real ability in the Post-Office who were conscientiously opposed to penny postage. They were those who had thoroughly mastered their own particular function, but were not accustomed to look beyond it. They had not been trained to the collection and use of statistics, and they were all naturally and properly anxious to keep up the net revenue of their department at the highest possible point.

Of all the official witnesses who went before the Select Committee, probably Sir Edward Lees, Secretary of the Post-Office in Edinburgh, who had filled the like post in Dublin, and who had, moreover, in the course of his long service gone through many different

branches of the administration, and so had a thorough knowledge of all, and Mr. George Louis, were the most intelligent and reasonable. The former took the clear line that the cure for most of the evils ascertained to exist in postal management was a low and uniform rate of postage, and that if any change was made it should be to the proposed penny. He set his face stoutly against any provisional tinkering of the rates, but he dwelt with force on the loss of revenue likely to follow.

This surely was a defensible line for a civil servant to take. Not for him to tender definite opinions of his own on questions of high policy, but only to trace and connect cause and effect. It was for authority—for the Minister, the Government, and Parliament—to decide the issue.

The same view very strongly held in the Post-Office in 1838. Colonel Maberly went so far as to affirm that it was no part of the duty even of the Postmaster-General to advise a reduction of postage rates; the Chancellor of the Exchequer was the functionary to take cognizance of such a question as that. The Chancellor of the Exchequer is still the arbiter; but public opinion would estimate poorly the administrative qualities of a Postmaster-General who shrank from proposing sacrifices of revenue which he deemed justifiable and expedient.

Mr. George Louis brought ripe practical knowledge to bear on all the questions addressed to him. He had been twelve years in the foreign branch, eleven

years in the western district of England as Surveyor—in fact, his surveyorship extended from April, 1821, to January, 1835—and he had been for three years at the head of the mail-coach office. He resigned in the summer of 1838. All his evidence was clear and to the point, and the opinions he advanced were well-balanced and moderate.

Outside the Office advocates of penny postage were numerous and influential. Mr. Richard Cobden, 'an extensive manufacturer at Manchester,' came forward with Mr. Jones Lloyd, Lord Ashburton, and others in its support.

Mr. Hill's proposal as regards rate was that all letters not exceeding half an ounce in weight should be conveyed from one place in the United Kingdom to another for one penny. All letters over half an ounce were to be charged an additional penny for every additional half-ounce. If not prepaid the postage was to be doubled, though Mr. Hill was strongly in favour of compulsory pre-payment. Practically payment of postage is now made in advance, not, indeed, by compulsion (except in the case of parcels), but by free will of the people and change of habits. The levying of an extra postage on unpaid packets no doubt gave a fillip in the right direction.

Prepayment, however, in 1838 was objected to as contrary to the habit of the people of this country, who, it was urged, disliked it. Perhaps in some cases a deep-rooted constitutional aversion to making payment of any sort still exists; but that prepayment

should be objected to 'on the ground that it would diminish the security for the delivery of letters' is less intelligible. Yet so it was. Even in the twopenny post almost four letters out of five—126,000 out of 160,000—were posted unpaid.

The sight of an unpaid letter tendered for delivery showed the addressee in many cases all that he wanted to know; payment was thereupon refused, and the letter was returned to the sender. It did double duty for nothing, telling the addressee who it was that had written to him, and the sender that it had been seen and rejected. Finally the latter refused the returned missive.

It must not be supposed that penny postage was unknown in this country before the penny rate became uniform. The Postmaster-General had long possessed authority to set up a penny post wheresoever he thought fit. It was, however, purely a local post, and the selection of points between which it should run, arbitrary. A letter not exceeding 4 ounces in weight could be sent for a penny over a wide local area. Unlike Docwra's earlier penny post of 1680, which applied to London, this was a provincial post, which radiated from Bristol, as already stated, and many other post-towns.

At Exeter the penny post ran from Ottery to Moreton Hampstead, from Silverton to Star Cross; at Manchester from Glossop to Newton-le-Willows, from Wilmslow to Delph. The revenue derived from letters paying the rate of 1d. was, in the beginning of 1838,



as much as £56,000 a year, and the number of local letters 8,000,000.

In establishing penny posts, the principle was to take the post-town as the centre, and lay out a branch if the estimated receipts would cover cost. Then, as now, the department found local work profitable to the revenue, and increased accommodation productive of an increased number of letters. What was true then is true still.

Leeds made £964 a year out of its local post—at any rate, that was the revenue; Birmingham, £1,268; Liverpool, £1,581; Bristol, £1,731; and Manchester topped them all with £2,032. 'Fifth clause' posts did not amount to much. They brought in a bare £2,000 a year. The rule for establishing a fifth clause post was either that the inhabitants should propose it to the Post-Office, or that the latter should call a meeting of the inhabitants and make propositions to them. In the end any deficiency of revenue had usually to be made good by the department, which might just as well have taken the initiative in all cases.

The plan of a post within a post, a penny doing at the same time more and less than fourpence, of course gave rise to all sorts of anomalies, which, if hard to defend, were highly picturesque. For example, a 4-ounce packet posted at Exeter for South Zeal, 18 miles off, but within the limits of the local post, cost 1d.; a similar packet sent to Honiton, a distance of 16 miles, cost 6s. 8d.

Yet, strangely enough, while a penny post was given to villages, there was no direct communication, through the medium of the Post-Office, in populous manufacturing districts between 10 and 30 miles from Manchester. At Sabden, 28 miles off, Mr. Cobden stated that although there was a population of 1,200 souls there was no post-office, nor anything that served for one.

Here was solid ground for a reformer to work upon.

So deeply ingrained, however, was the idea that postage must increase with distance, that such schemes as came out of the Post-Office as alternatives to Rowland Hill's uniform penny rate all leant to multitudinous scales. Colonel Maberly tried his hand. He proposed to sacrifice £800,000 a year of revenue by adopting a scale of eleven gradations of distance and charge; up to 12 miles a postage of 2d. was to be levied; for 350 miles and over, 1s.

Not to be outdone by his chief, Mr. Paul Measor, postmaster of Exeter, propounded another graduated scale. This had a flavour of penny postage in it, as by his plan a letter was to be carried uniformly 5 miles for 1d.; then at increasing rates for 12 miles, 20, 40, 60, 80, 100 miles, and so on; in all he had sixteen gradations of charge for distance, winding up with a postage of 1s. 6d. for 500 miles. Even the shrewd Superintending President of the inland branch, Mr. William Bokenham, asserted that it was quite as easy to make twenty different

taxes of letters—meaning, as easy to assign to each letter its proper tax or charge out of twenty different rates—as to have only one rate. ‘Taxing’ is still a familiar term in the Post-Office.

What strikes one now as amazing is that these practical and experienced men failed to see that the labour and complexity which charge graduated by distance must have involved, and the impossibility of determining the distance with precision in all cases, pointed rather to simplicity of scales than numerous rates.

But the department might have replied that, as they had the fixing of the route which a letter followed, they alone knew the distance, and there was no appeal against their ruling—which would have been true.

As it was, so indifferently did the scale in actual operation work, that £122,531 a year had to be refunded for overcharges and other untenable taxes, the principle of rating by the route taken by the mail, however circuitous it might be, naturally giving rise to error and appeal. Moreover, the extra postage due to sinuosities of mail-routes, and the circuitous course which some letters had therefore to follow in reaching their destination, amounted in Great Britain to as much as £101,776 a year. That was too pretty a penny to be lightly cast aside.

Perhaps as striking an illustration as can be given of the oppressiveness of the old rates of postage is to be found in the evidence of Mr. G. Henson, a working hosier of Nottingham. He observed that ‘a servant-

girl goes perhaps 100 miles off; if she communicate with her friends once a month, that would be twelve tenpences—that is, 10s., a tenth part, perhaps, of her year's wages.'

One Hydra-headed abuse on which Hill plied the battle-axe was the system of franking, or evading payment of postage by means of the signature of a privileged person affixed to the outside of the letter, to the left hand of the superscription.

The postage represented by franked correspondence is estimated to have amounted in the year 1837 to the prodigious sum of £1,064,874 8s. 4d., which, of course, represented so much national loss. Seven millions of franks were affixed to packets otherwise chargeable with postage.

The revenue lost heavily by letters being sent otherwise than through the post. It was the boast of an extensive publisher and school-agent that he knew of and adopted evasions of the postal laws which enabled him to receive letters from Glasgow for 2d., on which the Post-Office would have levied at least 1s. 1d. He had practised evasion for eight years; he still practised it in 1838. Out of every 236 private letters he received, 169, according to a strict record which he kept, came to him otherwise than by the post. He considered that he had a right to send letters as he pleased, and did not feel it his duty to acquiesce in a bad law; every good man, he thought, should set himself against a bad law in order to get it changed. All this came out before

the committee appointed by the House of Commons November 23, 1837.

Mr. Peacock, solicitor of the Post-Office, was in favour of reducing the postage rates if only to check the illicit transmission of letters.

Mr. William Maury, President of the American Chamber of Commerce at Liverpool, deposed that at Liverpool Mr. William Banning (the postmaster of the day, and father or uncle of the late Mr. C. B. G. Banning, the third of that name, and predecessor of the present postmaster, Mr. J. D. Rich) had expected that some thousands of letters would pass through his office in order to be forwarded by the steamship *Sirius*, bound from Cork for New York, but to his astonishment he only received five letters. Mr. Maury added that by that ship at least 10,000 letters were in fact sent ; he had himself sent 200 letters by her, all of which went free.

At length the arguments in favour of Mr. Hill's plan prevailed, and as a consequence the welcome announcement from the Throne that the old rates of postage would be reduced. But in the meantime there had been hard fighting all along the line, and the reformer had had his work to do in beating down opposition and winning the day. Many of the objections advanced to the scheme are racily told by Mr. Hill himself. Here is an example :

‘ Another class of letters presenting a difficulty (here I am careful to quote the exact words) “ would be half-ounce letters weighing an ounce, or above.” I

could not but admit that letters exhibiting so remarkable a peculiarity might present difficulties with which I was not prepared to deal.'

It is not hard to imagine the reformer's grave smile of contentment, the twinkle in his eye, as with demure countenance and deliberate speech he made his humorous and at the same time sarcastic admission.

Not even when the main point was gained did the warfare cease, as the '*Life of Sir Rowland Hill*,'* edited and in part written by his nephew, Dr. Birkbeck Hill, has abundantly shown.

In the struggle for cheapened rates Mr. Wallace did yeoman's service. Penny postage must no doubt in any case eventually have come; but he helped to smooth the rugged path, himself carried many reforms, and gave Mr. Hill a cordial and welcome support. Mr. Wallace well might stand in a group with the chief actors in the final scene of the fray: Lord Melbourne, the Premier of the day, on one side (though thinking of other things than penny postage); Sir Francis Baring, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, signing the Treasury warrant of 1839, on the other; between them, in the foreground, Rowland Hill; Mr. Wallace, M.P., and Mr. T. W. Hill, the great man's father, not too inconspicuous in the rear. In this case, a sense of the fitness of things would seem to suggest that as honour—and justly so—accrued to the famous son, one at least of the revered parents, if not both, might properly be honoured too.

* Delarue, London, 1879.

However, penny postage became an established fact, and the Shetland Islands, which had had to pay 1s. or more on their letters, now paid only the uniform penny, and wrote at least a dozen letters for every one they had written before.

Then came about a remarkable change in ways and manners of letter-writers. When the rates of postage were various, and ranged from 4d. for a 'single' letter for a distance of 15 miles, to 1s. for 300, and 1d. for every 100 miles beyond, letters were extensively posted unpaid.

As mentioned, 4d. for postage was the common demand on the delivery of a letter at Barnet, which is 11 miles from London. In a popular book for children, entitled 'The Parent's Cabinet,' published sixty years ago, Mr. Harmer, who lived in the suburbs of London, expresses himself with some enthusiasm at the moderation of the charge of 1s. 1d. which he has to pay on a letter for his little son from Uncle Alfred at Manchester—11d. was the postage to London, and 2d. the charge for retransmission to a suburban part. It obviously never occurred to him that the writer might just as well have paid for his letter in advance. Perhaps there was a certain sense of equity in this practice. You who had the labour of writing—and letters were long ones in those days, even crossed—went scot-free; and it was he who had the pleasure of receiving the letter that had to pay the piper, or, rather, the postman.

Be that as it may, 'Letter, fou'-pence,' ceased to be

the cry: the sender paid the penny in cash; a little while later cut with the scissors a penny label from a sheet or strip of postage-stamps, covered at the back with a 'glutinous wash'; for awhile he enclosed his letter in the somewhat fantastic yet artistically drawn cover of Mulready, and finally abandoned himself to the luxury of the gummed envelopes and perforated or embossed postage-stamps which have come down to our day.

In a 'Philatelic History' by 'Phil,' we are told that the original sketch for the postage-stamp bore the Queen's head and the legend, 'Post-Office—One Penny—Half-ounce,' and that the head of Queen Victoria on the penny embossed stamp was copied from Wyon's medal, which was struck in commemoration of her Majesty's visit to the City of London in November, 1837.

No longer was it needful for the Post-Office to hold letters up to the light for the detection of enclosures. Weight, not number of slips of paper enclosed, nor distance either, now decided the charge.

Away, at a blow, were swept the notable abuses of the franking practice, and the devices all and singular for defrauding the revenue. 'Mr. Jones' on the wrapper of a newspaper (which, by the way, went free) had told one story to the recipient; 'Jones, Esquire,' another.

Rowland Hill himself, in youthful days, had economized slender means by use of an ingenious code which displayed itself on newspaper-wrappers—the

names superscribed of members of the two political parties signifying various degrees of bodily health.

Like most inventions which prove beneficial to the public, the adoption of the simple and highly convenient plan of perforating by machinery the rows of postage-stamps so as to admit of easy separation was the cause of much heart-burning to the ingenious patentee, Mr. Henry Archer. The perforating-machine which, in 1847, he submitted to the Post-Office was at once pronounced to be 'a clever and useful invention.' The Board of Stamps and Taxes also thought well of it, and obtained Treasury authority for allowing Messrs. Bacon and Petch, postage-stamp printers, to try one of Mr. Archer's machines under the direction of Mr. Edwin Hill, Sir Rowland's brother.

After various trials and the correction of mechanical defects, the latest machine proved successful; and then arose the question of remunerating the patentee. Machines in the perfected form were to cost £200 apiece; but the Board, while maintaining that the perforating process was well known, recognised the fact that a first machine is necessarily more expensive to make than copies, and as Mr. Archer had been about three years engaged in the effort to bring his invention to perfection, they were of opinion that £300 for the machine which he had supplied, and £300 as a personal payment, would be a sufficient compensation. However, the Treasury thought that £200 in addition to the purchase-money would be

sufficient remuneration. The Post-Office concurred in this view.

But at length it seems to have been borne in on the minds of all concerned that the knocking off of £100 was not quite in harmony with justice and liberality. But how to put it on again? To say 'No' one day and 'Yes' the next is not the way in which her Majesty's Government is carried on.

A happy thought struck Mr. Thomas Keogh, Secretary of the Inland Revenue Department. He was an old official hand, and well aware that, although all roads lead to Rome, some have easier gradients than others. The construction of the machine, he found, had cost more even than £300, though the precise amount could not be ascertained; and so, while maintaining the justice of the view of my Lords that £200 was sufficient personal remuneration, he suggested that, instead of paying Mr. Archer two sums of £300 as at first advised, he should be paid two sums of £400 and £200 respectively. This ingenious idea brought down both birds by the same barrel, upholding as it did the original proposal to pay £600, without breaking through the Treasury decision to pay as personal compensation no more than £200. It was a master-stroke, only equalled, though not surpassed, by what happened within my own knowledge to a civil servant, who received his salary in two payments, one of £720, and another of £80, a year. He was called in by the head of the department and gravely informed that, in recognition of his

ability and services, he was to be advanced to a higher post, and paid at once, not in two sums, but in one sum, £800 a year.

Mr. Keogh's dexterous and kindly strategy, however, went for nothing. Mr. Archer—such is the ingratitude of inventors—declined to see the offer in the desired light. The honour of being successful did not entirely content him. Even the attractive bait of £600, to be taken in two bites at the same moment, did not by its novelty fascinate. Mr. Tilley's letters making the offer from the Post-Office received no answer. Instead of replying, Mr. Archer took an arrow from his quiver and shot it at the Treasury. 'A change, it would appear, had come over the spirit of the Whitehall dream. By a leap and bound up went the offer from £600 to £2,000, now with no nice distinction of so much for this and a separate receipt for that. Then did Mr. Archer prove himself master of the situation. He declined even the higher offer as 'wholly inadequate,' and—this was the unkindest cut of all—actually turned a pet official phrase against the department itself by adding in quotation marks, 'under all the circumstances of the case.'

He felt his claim to be strong and the ground beneath him sure, and he had a staunch supporter in Mr. Muntz, M.P. for Birmingham, on whose motion Parliament called for the correspondence, and soon granted a Select Committee. Rowland Hill was ordered before it. His clear head saw that the value

of the invention lay in saving the public trouble, and that the less of it they had in snipping off stamps the more of them they would use. The Committee reported in Mr. Archer's favour, and eventually the Government bought his patent outright, and paid him £4,000.

Penny postage is responsible for ultimately doing away with a quaint custom, viz., the use of bells by City postmen. The practice was ancient. A print is extant of 'A Letter-Woman (with a bell) 1768.' A high official, of more than fifty years' service, has preserved a bell used by a letter-carrier in the City up to 1840, and so within his own time.

The actual wages of the letter-carriers at the earliest date of this narrative (January 1, 1832) were wholly inadequate, and the men drew the greater portion of their incomes from other sources. Some by seniority and good conduct had assigned to them 'walks,' which were fruitful in pence paid to them on letters collected in the evening, when ringing their bells, and in gratuities from merchants, to whom they gave credit (at their own risk) for postage.

Many of these officials must have sorely needed emoluments, inasmuch as 42 established men were paid no more than 8s. a week, 12 only 11s., and none except the river postmen (who received £2) more than 14s. a week; so that the helpful pence (1d. per letter was paid to the letter-carrier over and above any postage chargeable) were very welcome.

Before penny postage came about there were 35

letter-carriers, having early deliveries, who rang bells ; and 101 who had no early delivery, but rang bells too. The 136 got, on an average, £18 11s. 7d. a year, or 7s. a week apiece, but some only 2s. 6d. a week.

The letter-writers of that day did not always observe a large-hearted liberality, inasmuch as many persons who paid for the early delivery made the bellmen collect their letters at night for nothing. Merchants in the City of the present day give to postmen and Post-Office institutions with both hands, and are generous to the postal servant in all their ways.

At this point it occurs to me that, in these days of the proposed legislative limitation of the hours of labour to eight daily, it may be interesting to note the official view of sixty-two years ago. The salaries of the junior classes in the Inland Office had always been fixed at a low rate, on the principle ' that, the duties being early in the morning and late in the afternoon, young men of diligent and industrious habits might employ the middle of the day in other avocations for their own pecuniary advantage.' It never seems to have struck my sagacious colleagues of the past that a young man of eighteen or twenty, who had to rise at 3 a.m. in order to be at St. Martin's-le-Grand by 4 or 5 o'clock, who worked there until 8 or 9, and who then spent the day in another ' avocation,' would hardly be fit for much when he resumed duty at 5 in the afternoon, or that his health could not long stand want of sleep and the strain of 16 hours' work a day.

It was foreseen that uniform penny postage must

be attended with temporary loss of revenue. The last complete year of the high rates (January 5, 1839), yielded a profit of £1,659,509; the following year, into a part of which came reduced rates, but not penny postage, about £26,000 less. The first complete year—complete if we disregard five days before the uniform penny rate was in actual force—produced £500,789 of net revenue. So there was a loss at the outset of rather more than £1,000,000. But the gain to public convenience outweighed even this considerable reduction of profits.

Mr. Hill did not at once fall into his right position. First he received a temporary appointment at the Treasury—to keep an eye, as it were, on St. Martin's-le-Grand. Then it was thought his services were superfluous, and in 1842, under Sir Robert Peel's Government, Mr. Henry Goulburn did in fact inform him that his further assistance could safely be dispensed with. Four years later the Government of Lord John Russell recalled him from private life, and on December 9, 1846, he commenced his duties at the Post-Office under the Marquis of Clanricarde, as 'Secretary to the Postmaster - General,' Colonel Maberly having co-ordinate authority.

Finally, opposition of all kinds collapsed. But it was only in 1854, fourteen years after his great scheme had come into operation, that Mr. Hill became what he ought to have been from the first—Secretary of the Post-Office.

The interval, a long seven years, between the one
VOL. I.

secretaryship and the other bristled with as many difficulties, and was the occasion of as much vexation of spirit, as probably ever fell, in the same space of time, to the lot of a public man. But, to be just, the waters can hardly have been smoother for the official whom Rowland Hill eventually displaced.

The discomforts which the new-comer had to endure were, as it seems to me, as much the fault of the situation as that of the human beings whom he found antagonistic or coldly indifferent. Of all anomalous positions, this office of Secretary to the Postmaster-General was the most trying which can be conceived. Colonel Maberly, as Secretary of the Post-Office, was the real head to whom all eyes turned for directions, and it seemed as though his colleague must risk a collision with him on the numberless points on which their views were opposed, or become his subordinate. The latter, at any rate, was out of the question.

In one of the Postmasters-General Hill found a Minister who, holding the justifiable theory that there could not be two kings in Brentford, so hampered his freedom of action that the burden became almost insupportable; and even at a later period, with Minister and Ministry in the Junior Secretary's favour, no suitable adjustment of the difficulty could for some years be found.

It is easy to see now what would have been the right course: viz., in accepting the reformer's plan to have cast on him, with adequate powers, the responsibility of execution. That would have meant, as at



last it did mean, supersession of the *de facto* Secretary. But there was a not altogether unreasonable hesitation in shelving Colonel Maberly, and turning over the control of a great department to a man comparatively strange to official life.

As for the permanent officials, it was not in the nature of things that a new-comer, unknown, it might be said, to the Civil Service—one who had flouted their opinions and torn into shreds their statistics; who had come to the Post-Office to teach them the business they had spent their lives in conducting; who meant at first to cut away a million of pounds from the net revenue—should all at once be received with open arms as *persona grata*, bent on building up the fortunes of all the men in the office, and making things pleasant all round.

In their perplexity the statesmen of the day had sanctioned an arrangement of which it must be said that the wonder is, not that it did not work well, but that it ever worked at all.

However, in 1854 Rowland Hill was firmly seated at last as Secretary of the Post-Office, and, with the approval of the country, bending the full powers of his mind on progress and reform. He was then verging on sixty years of age, so that he had reached the full maturity of life before he obtained the position to which his remarkable ability and great public services had clearly entitled him. This was his happiest time at St. Martin's-le-Grand. 'I entered now,' he has written, 'upon the most satisfactory

period of my whole official career—that in which the course of improvement was steadiest, most rapid, and least chequered.’

If the right thing was done at last in making Rowland Hill Secretary of the Post-Office, it does not greatly signify what was the precise way of doing it; yet the Treasury took a course which, after a lapse of forty years, still strikes one on the face of it as unusual. Room had to be made for Mr. Hill by removing Colonel Maberly. That was done by transferring the Colonel to the Board of Audit. With whom rests the appointment of the Commissioners of Audit is immaterial; probably the Treasury fill up vacancies by warrant. But all appointments at the Post-Office, beyond question, lay then, as they lie now, with the Postmaster-General. He alone can exercise the power which makes a designation to office legal and secure. Yet, according to the letter printed in the ‘*Life of Sir Rowland Hill*,’ the Treasury wrote to the Postmaster-General stating that their lordships had made a minute on April 24, 1854, appointing Lieutenant-Colonel Maberly to a seat at the Board of Audit, and ‘consolidating the appointments of Secretary to the General Post-Office and Secretary to the Postmaster-General in the person of Mr. Rowland Hill.’

This letter can only be read as though my Lords, and not the Postmaster-General, made the appointment. In all probability, however, the scribe who drafted the official letter, taking as his text the

Treasury minute, gave by inadvertence a twist to the language of my Lords which their lordships had never intended. If so, it is strange that the error escaped the eye of so critical and experienced a functionary as Sir Charles Trevelyan. The Premier or the Chancellor of the Exchequer had probably expressed at the Board itself an opinion that such an appointment would be desirable, and the draftsman took it on himself to assume that an expression of opinion was tantamount to a definite appointment. It is to the last degree improbable, looking at the composition of the Treasury Board in 1854, that my Lords would have directed that to be done which was *ultra vires*.

Whether, on receipt of the Treasury letter, Lord Canning gave a covering sanction as a matter of form, or merely initialled the letter 'Cg.,' as with a certain class of papers was his custom, the records of the office may show.

Well might Sir Rowland in later years contend that he had received his appointment from the Treasury direct rather than under the patent of Viscount Canning. There was no mistake, however, as to the proper course amongst the permanent officials of the Post-Office. Some yet in the service will recollect the public notice of April, 1854, stating that 'the Postmaster-General' had 'appointed Rowland Hill, Esq., to be Secretary of this department'—a notice probably originated by the Chief Clerk, the late Mr. Rodie Parkhurst.

Constitutional practice seemed to require that the Treasury should have limited their letter to an intimation of willingness (and probably such was the intention) to sanction a consolidation with the object stated, and have left it for Lord Canning to accept the suggestion, and in the regular course to himself appoint Mr. Hill to the consolidated post. A great many years afterwards somewhat similar circumstances raised a tiny cloudlet on the postal horizon, but good sense in accepting the true view of the scope of the Minister's patent happily prevented mischief.

An amusing anecdote is still current concerning Sir Rowland Hill and Mr. Anthony Trollope, the novelist, who for many years was a Surveyor in the Post-Office. One day Sir Rowland (then Mr.) Hill called the surveyors together to consider a paper of instructions about to be sent out on some important matter. It was probably the draft of the circular to surveyors of nineteen paragraphs which Sir Rowland issued on April 25, 1855 (my official service was then just a week old!), defining their duties and responsibilities. His object, no doubt, was to satisfy himself that the circular covered all the intended ground. When it was read aloud, the impetuous Trollope, properly eager, as a young man, to show that he had a head on his shoulders, challenged not the scope and tenor of the instructions, but the literary composition. That, however, was not Sir Rowland's object in convening the meeting.

'I think, Mr. Hill,' Trollope is reported in sub-

stance to have said, 'that the language of paragraph so-and-so, literally construed, may be held to mean what you do not intend.' Sir Rowland was hardly the man to be checked by anyone, much less by a younger and (on postal policy, at any rate) less-informed man; so he neatly rejoined, speaking slowly and deliberately, and enunciating the letter 'r' in each word with Midland distinctness: 'You must be aware, Mr. Trollope, that a phrase is not always intended to bear a literal construction. For instance, when I write to one of you gentlemen, I end my letter with the words, "I am, sir, your obedient servant," whereas you know I am nothing of the sort.'

Sir Rowland sat in the same room—perhaps in the same chair—that his eminent predecessor, Sir Francis Freeling, had used not a score of years before, and by a coincidence bought Bertram House at Hampstead, a comfortable residence close to the mansion in which Sir Francis lived and in which, it is thought, he died. So close was it that at one time a splendid avenue of Spanish chestnuts (a few trees still remain) led down from Roslyn House almost to the door of Bertram House, where on August 27, 1879, Sir Rowland ended his honoured life, and where in June, 1893, a commemorative tablet was, with the permission of the Metropolitan Asylums Board, affixed to the wall.

During the period of comparative tranquillity in the mid-fifties Sir Rowland was able to give undivided

attention to many highly important features of Post-Office management. Date-stamping, for instance, which, if the impressions are perfectly produced, has many commercial, and even legal, aspects of value, lacked, but too often, clearness. Rowland Hill sought for improvements both in the quality of the ink and methods. His son, Mr. Pearson Hill, designed a new stamping machine for which, long after Sir Rowland ceased to be Secretary, the Treasury awarded him a payment of £1,500.

To the Savings Bank proposals of Sir C. W. Sikes he gave commendation and support as they came to him through his friend, Mr. (afterwards Sir) Edward Baines, then the Member for Leeds.

On salaries he bestowed much thought, being of opinion that if any of the officers of the department are underpaid it is rather those in the higher walks than the lower—a defect not wholly remedied even at the present day.

The volunteer movement received Sir Rowland's cordial support. The Post-Office regiment of volunteers is amongst the finest in the reserve.

On the question of compulsory prepayment of postage he was, of course, right in his views as to its tendency to simplify accounts and economize time and expense. But the public would not see it in that light, and could not be made as earnest in defence of the plan as the opponents were in attack. So the measure was indefinitely postponed.

Sir Rowland was a warm friend to the principle of

tubular conveyance, and would gladly have made use of tubes in connection with the London district postal system; but on investigation he found that the economy in time would not be sufficient to justify the additional expense likely to be involved.

So the idea was reluctantly given up, although there is little doubt that Sir Rowland continued to lean to it throughout life. His imagination had been fired by an attempt made forty years before by Mr. Vallance to propel passengers through a partially exhausted tube, with a view to the construction of an air-tight tunnel between London and Brighton. A tunnel 50 miles long and air-tight to boot!

A passenger in a short experimental trip told Rowland Hill that on reaching the terminus he and those with him 'got a bang' by the abrupt stoppage of the vehicle. Sixty years after Mr. Vallance's essay a gentleman brought to me at the Post-Office his plan for conveying the mails by electricity through a tube to Liverpool at the rate of 200 miles an hour. The same idea of 'a bang' at the terminus occurred to me; but the inventor regarded it as a detail easily met, though he failed to convince me of the propriety of the Post-Office embarking on an experiment which, if practicable and prospectively remunerative, ought, perhaps, first to be tested by commercial enterprise.

The Pneumatic Despatch Company, indeed, many years ago established a tubular communication between the south-western corner of the Post-Office yard, Euston Square railway-station, and the north-

western district post-office in Eversholt Street. In 1873-74 a few day mail bags were daily sent by it between St. Martin's-le-Grand and Euston, but after a time the experiment was abandoned.

One of the engineers consulted by Rowland Hill was my cousin, the late Mr. Edward Alfred Cowper, C.E., who more than once discussed with me the matter of the conveyance at least of express letters by pneumatic tube in London within the last two or three years. But the Post-Office has never got beyond the transmission of telegrams by this means over a distance of 2 or 3 miles. Large funds would be required for trials on an effective scale, to greater distances, which it would need some address to persuade a Chancellor of the Exchequer—not to say Parliament—to provide.

Tubes for the conveyance of mails have exercised a fascination over the minds of inventors for a length of time, as witness Mr. Cadogan Williams' proposal of 1826 to effect propulsion from stage to stage by a subterranean channel provided with furnaces and valve-boxes for alternately creating vacuum and pressure.

The idea, propounded when the century was young (which 'An Old Coachman' has disinterred), of an officer of the Royal Engineers, who would have the mails shelled from point to point by means of a succession of cannon and relays of trusty bombardiers, planted at suitable intervals along the mail-road, though striking, is not quite so original as it looks.

For in the possession of Mr. J. W. Hyde, Controller of the Post-Office in Edinburgh, is a photograph of a letter which was actually sent out for delivery, by being fired off in a hollow cannon-ball at the siege of Neuss, in Germany, in 1473, four centuries ago.

In 1858 the mind of the Secretary was much exercised by the resolution of Government to extend postal facilities in favour of the public press. He seemed to think that things had already gone far enough, inasmuch as the heavier newspapers were even then rated at only one-eighth of the postage chargeable on letters. Perhaps his prescient soul foresaw the present time, when a newspaper weighing 17 ounces or more passes through the post for a halfpenny, which is equal to the eleventh part only of the postage to which a letter of similar weight is liable.

The Government of the day, however, were no doubt of opinion that the liberal dissemination of public intelligence had advantages to the body politic which more than outweighed the burden cast upon the Post-Office, though such involved the carrying of postal matter in its mails at less than cost price. Their policy overbore the scruples of the department.

Many other useful measures were considered and promoted, though under the stress of uncertain health and uncongenial associations—but is not all this told in detail in Dr. Hill's valuable work?

Penny postage meant, of course, a great deal more than a sweeping reduction of postal rates. It meant

also quicker posts, more abundant facilities, and an efficient administration. It was the thin end of the wedge which split up excessive charges on foreign and colonial letters and opened the way for a parcel post forty years later.

Moreover, when Rowland Hill was established in the secretarial chair, the spirit of a true reformer began to influence all ranks of the service.

The halcyon state of things which prevailed at the time of my entering the service was not to last long. For six years, indeed, from 1854 to 1859, there was 'peace at the Post-Office,' and my recollection is distinct of the force with which Rowland Hill's mind stamped itself on all that came within my limited purview. But in 1860 occurred a change. Hostility developed itself — the health of the Secretary, sorely shaken by a generation of anxious and laborious work, began to fail. He continued, it is believed, to enjoy the full confidence and sympathy of the brilliant, the illustrious statesman then, as now, at the head of the Treasury;* but, to use his own words, in the Post-Office the ground was slipping from beneath his feet. In March, 1864, he resigned his appointment; in August, 1879, he died.

The Sovereign had created her servant a Knight of the Bath; Parliament had voted him £20,000; the Treasury had granted superannuation on full pay;

* These words were written while the Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone, M.P., was still Prime Minister, and as such First Lord of the Treasury.

the public presented testimonials, one of them a sum of £13,000; the City of London bestowed on him its freedom, the University of Oxford an honorary degree. His statue is to be found near the Royal Exchange in London, in the Post-Office at Birmingham, in his native town of Kidderminster, in the Vestry Hall of Hampstead. His grave, with his bust over it, is in Westminster Abbey. But the most enduring, the most splendid memorial of Sir Rowland Hill is that great organization which with speed, punctuality and cheapness daily performs its allotted task over the length and breadth of the land.

What are some of the prodigious results of the changes planned by this indomitable reformer as tested by the experience of half a century? 76,500,000 high-priced letters have given place to 1,800,000,000 cheap ones; 400,000,000 packets at book-post rates pass through the post where, if we except the newspapers and 'Prices Current,' none had passed before. All nations have followed Rowland Hill's lead in adopting low and uniform postage; all honour his illustrious name. 'His advent to the administration of the Post-Office,' writes a colleague of fifty-three years' service, 'quickened its action in all directions,' and the influence so exercised, to the great advantage of the State, continues to be felt and to bear fruit to this day.

CHAPTER V.

THE ELECTRIC TELEGRAPH.

IF the decennial period which ended in December, 1839, had seen the decay of one great industry in which the Post-Office had been vitally interested, and the uprising of another in connection with which the usefulness of the department and its prosperity have in these later years advanced by leaps and bounds, not the less did the following decade open auspiciously with the great fiscal change just described.

Yet, far-reaching in its beneficial results to mankind as was the amelioration of the rates of postage, a more startling and hardly less beneficent departure, while the forties were still in their prime, began as a coming event to cast its shadow before.

The Post-Office, indeed, was not to take the lead in telegraphic reform until many years later; all the same, the decade which saw the birth of penny postage saw also the realization of the dreams of many a scientist—the employment for public purposes of a practicable electric telegraph. The homely but important experiments of Messrs. Cooke and Wheatstone



with galvanic batteries, some miles of insulated wire, and a few galvanometers and commutators between Euston Square and Chalk Farm railway-stations had borne fruit; a commercial value accrued to their invention, and the Electric Telegraph Company, consisting of John Lewis Ricardo, Member of Parliament for Stoke-upon-Trent, as chairman, and seven other men of means, had been formed to acquire and work their patents.

Wisely enough, the company sought to attach itself to the State, make itself useful to the Government, and gain a firm foothold where it was able. So it happened that a telegraph-office came to be established in the Post-Office, though purely as a private enterprise, and one in no sense connected with the State. Little did the Postmaster-General of the day, when he admitted the wires to the building, foresee the time when the Post-Office itself should control telegraphic communication, and develop and bring to perfection the telegraph's marvellous capabilities.

In 1846, on the incorporation of the Electric Telegraph Company, I had acquired a taste for telegraphy, and at only fourteen years of age had mastered its principles and language; and when in April, 1848, the Company and the Postmaster-General had made their agreement for bringing the 'Electrical Telegraph' to the Post-Office, the company, at the suggestion of Mr. Rowland Hill and his brother, Mr. Frederic Hill (my uncle by marriage), took me into their service. They gave me a thorough

drilling at IK, their central telegraph station in Lothbury, and sent me to take charge of the new telegraph-station.

The dark closet, for it was little more, which served for an office, held me from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. for two or three years. It was formed out of part of a spare passage, and was situated in the south-east corner of the southern of the two aisles or colonnades which at that time flanked either side of the great central hall.

The messages at the new office were few. The charges were so high that for the most part it was only in an emergency that the telegraph was resorted to. Even the Post-Office, with favoured rates, made little use of it. As much as ten years later so little familiar had the telegraph become to official people that the form of instruction to a postmaster to have recourse to it was 'to forward the information required by means of the "electric telegraph."' We were yet twenty years from the handy injunction, 'Wire reply.' Perhaps not more than two or three messages spread over ten hours of daily attendance beguiled the too abundant leisure of the young telegraphist shut up alone in his dark little box. It was a weary time.

On Friday, February 21, 1851, whilst employed at this office, I received a telegram for Mr. Peacock, the Solicitor of the Post-Office, respecting the removal of a convict from a hulk to a transport, the meaning of which I have only fathomed to-day, June 21, 1894—that is, forty-three years later.



It related to an audacious robbery of the up mail-train from Plymouth on the Bristol and Exeter Railway on January 1, 1849.

The train arrived at Bridgwater at its usual time—viz., 10.30 p.m. At this station the bags collected on the way were locked in the tender at the rear of the Post-Office carriage. The train then proceeded on its run to Bristol without stoppage. Here the mail-guard discovered that all the bags had been tampered with. Some were ripped open; others had their seals broken and their fastenings cut. It was soon evident that the registered letters and banking parcels had been abstracted, and as the letter-bills had been stolen also, the loss could not even be estimated. Later on the down mail-train, which left London at 8.55 on the same evening, was robbed in a precisely similar manner.

The operations of the thieves involved no ordinary peril. On the up journey they left their carriage whilst the train was travelling at full speed, and crawled along the narrow footboard for some feet before reaching the door of the tender containing the mails. Keys to unlock the door had been provided beforehand. On completing the robbery, the thieves jumped from the train when approaching Bristol, and, secreting their booty, returned to rob the down mail. But the pitcher went to the well once too often.

In perpetrating the second robbery the thieves had overlooked the fact that the same two Post-Office officials who were in charge of the up mail to Bristol

would return with the down mail to Bridgwater, and, after the discovery of the first robbery, would probably be keenly on the alert. Of course, at Bridgwater, where the second attempt was detected, all the exits of the station were carefully closed, and the train was immediately searched, with the result that in a first-class compartment adjoining the Post-Office carriage registered letters and money parcels were found, and in the same compartment two men. A false moustache, a black crêpe mask, and other disguises betrayed their calling. Perhaps more incriminating than all, a piece of string was seen attached to the boot of one of the men of precisely the same description as the string used in an attempt to refasten a bag robbed in the up mail.

One culprit proved to be a discharged guard of the Great Western Railway. The identity of the other was more difficult to establish, but he was ultimately discovered to be a London horse-dealer, whose father, by a curious coincidence, had been tried and acquitted on a charge of robbing a mail-train many years before.

A strange fact in connection with this matter is that the plan of the robbery was divulged before it took place by the wife of one of the accomplices, in revenge for brutal treatment. The information was not, however, taken seriously.

Chief Justice William, Lord Denman, sentenced the culprits in March, 1849, to fifteen years' transportation.

Now comes in my telegram. These two men were obviously the principals. But there were confederates. While the proceeds of the robbery of the down mail were seized by the authorities, the booty captured on the up mail passed out of sight. In February, 1851, a convict about to be deported to a penal settlement declared he could reveal the hiding-place and name the actual receiver of the stolen property. The telegram was sent to enable the Solicitor of the Post-Office to obtain his deposition before the transport sailed. But the story turned out to be a fabrication, devised by the prisoner to evade transportation. The stolen notes had been presented and paid at the Bank of England, the vessel sailed from Spithead, all the malefactors disappeared from view, the fame of the great robbery died away, and its method was forgotten, until, as I shall show later on,* history repeated itself.

The Electric Telegraph Company, in the middle of the forties, had built for themselves as a central telegraph-station an elegant suite of offices (now in the possession of Messrs. Brown, Shipley, and Co.) in Founders' Court. The plan was that of a public hall, open to the roof, sundry offices, and a board-room beyond. Right and left of the public hall were three or four galleries, one over the other, for operative and administrative purposes. Only the eastern set were ever used for telegraphic work; the western set were occupied by the secretarial

* See p. 279.

officers, or were left empty, so small was the beginning of a great thing.

These galleries, one over the other, have given the name for nearly half a century to telegraph instrument rooms generally; so to this day the spacious operating-chambers of the Central Telegraph Office in St. Martin's-le-Grand, which are really vast saloons, go under the name of galleries.

The lowest gallery at Lothbury was styled the 'code-room,' a cognomen which, though never in the least applicable, was preserved in the later building in Telegraph Street up to the transfer of the telegraphs to the State in 1870. In this room, arbitrary signals were supposed to be translated into the vernacular, but the idea of codes as a means of economizing the use of the wires was never adopted, except to a very limited extent, by the Electric Telegraph Company. The 'codes' were not those used by the public for the sake of shrouding the meaning or lowering the cost of telegrams, but Wishaw's Codes of 1846, which substituted a brace of letters for names of men or places or a group of words.

They were ingenious devices, but of little practical utility. Out of them, however, came IK (pronounced separately, Igh Kay), the code equivalent of the name of the chief station (London).

The double-needle apparatus of Cooke and Wheatstone was in use. The needles at first were long and heavy. They waved to and fro across the face of the

dial with exasperating slowness. About six or eight words a minute was a fair working speed, so the saving or abbreviating of words was of real importance. In later years, with shorter and lighter needles, as many as 40 words a minute could be read with ease, and then codes were of still less value.

Mr. Wishaw's codes, however, furnished a good deal of information by the use of four letters—two for principles and two for details. Thus, ZD or ZL meant a number of some sort; AM a particular number—one, for instance. ZY meant a telegram of some sort, CW a private one. So in this rather cumbersome way the first paid private telegram of the day was signalled: ZD, AM; ZY, CW. A telegram in the earliest days of all was delivered to a merchant in Sheffield with these cabalistic signs upon it, much to his bewilderment!

CW existed until recently; amongst the old stagers it is still understood, but M has freely taken its place. 'What caused the delay?' would ask an official querist. 'A very long CW to Birmingham,' might be the answer forty years ago; or as now, 'Derby had a good many M's on hand.' ZM referred to wind and weather. 'ZM fine,' is still a frequent entry in the office diaries, London fogs notwithstanding. DO for shipping news, and CS for Parliamentary intelligence, survived until the transfer of the telegraphs to the Post-Office. Then the work of editing news was handed over to the news agencies, and many of the old codes fell into disuse. CQ, meaning all stations,

still holds its own. PQ was one of the last to go, as it was, in the order of signals, the last for use in a message. It was an innocent code enough, meaning only 'end of message.' But under certain circumstances it could goad the distant operator to fury; because, abruptly given, it might have the significance of 'Shut up!' 'You're a muff!' and other interjections more vigorous than polite. Now, for the clerk, say at York, to be PQ'd by IK in the middle of some courteous explanation of the causes of slow reading 200 miles away, was more than the best-balanced mind and strongest apparatus could stand; and it was a common occurrence for the stout brass handles of the double-needle telegraph to be broken off by the aggrieved clerk in the white heat of his passionate telegraphic remonstrance.

Besides IK for London, Wishaw's Codes provided IH for Liverpool, AP for Manchester, GX for Hull, KM for Newcastle, EL for Edinburgh, FO for Glasgow, and so on. The initials did not necessarily bear any relation to the names of the places, and ultimately the codes were rearranged in order to produce some sort of connection between the two. Then LY stood for Lothbury, instead of IK; and MR for Manchester, BM for Birmingham, GW for Glasgow, etc., replaced the arbitrary codes formerly in use.

When, as one of the preparations for the transfer in 1870, it fell to me to revise and enlarge the code-book, my aim was to preserve unchanged the appropriate codes as far as possible, to distribute all the

remaining two-letter permutations of the alphabet amongst the big towns, and to symbolize the smaller ones by three letters. So BM is still the code for Birmingham, but Barnet is BBT. LY, it is true, is deposed from its high estate, and TS (once Telegraph Street, now Telegraph Station, Central implied) reigns in its stead.

Here is the old gallery at Lothbury as it was in the beginning. A room perhaps 12 or 14 feet wide and 30 feet long, well lighted and with plenty of ventilation. In it are ten or a dozen persons. Two high benches jut out at right angles from the windows, the instruments upon them thus getting a good side-light. On one is fixed a double-needle instrument working to Rugby and Derby, and to Normanton in Yorkshire. Behind it operates a printing wire to Manchester on the principle of Bain's chemical process. Opposite, on the other bench, a double-needle to Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool. Behind it, a double-needle to the Admiralty, rarely used—never in my recollection—out of sight, out of mind, at both ends of the circuit.

It is singular that the company, having provided the communication, did not in some way coax the Admiralty into the use of it. To make themselves indispensable must have been an important condition to the commercial success of a young company. But the Admiralty did not take to any new-fangled ways. There is probably in that direction a constitutional repugnance to electric telegraphs. Ships and guns

are one thing, but electricity and wires, as applied to human intercourse, may be another. An early inventor, who went down to Whitehall, electric telegraph in hand, to offer his services, is said to have been snubbed for his pains. The semaphore answered every purpose. Half a century later, it scarcely fared better with me and my coast communication, even though the shadow of the Prime Minister in a manner fell on the proposals.

The observant reader will have seen that two pairs of needle-wires and a wire for the so-called printing—in all, five wires—before 1850, sufficed to meet the telegraphic requirements with London of the whole of the North of England and Scotland. Now the same service is provided for by 104 wires, and, thanks to better insulation and improved processes, the average capacity of each, originally 3 or 4 words per minute, but increased in my time to 15, is now probably not less than 30 words per minute. So, put briefly, requirements which in 1848 were met by the power of 5 wires, in the year of grace 1892 were only met, at the lowest computation, by 104, working at twice the speed of the old ones; in other words, by the power of 208, so vastly has business increased.

As will be seen hereafter, my estimate was not at fault in 1856 in foretelling on the basis of 1,000,000 messages then forwarded in a year at high rates a total so large as 30,000,000 messages a year within fourteen years of the adoption of extended facilities and a uniform 6d. rate. In 1892 as many as

70,000,000 telegrams passed over the Post-Office wires, besides part of some hundreds of millions of telephonic and private-wire despatches.

Besides the four instruments mentioned, there were on a long table opposite the windows, and with the light falling full upon them, a double-needle circuit to Norwich, one to No. 448, Strand (the only branch-office of the company in London), another to Southampton, and perhaps a fourth, fifth, and sixth to Waterloo, Paddington, and Shoreditch. Such was the modest head telegraph-office of the country when our gracious Sovereign Lady Queen Victoria had been about ten years on her throne.

‘Are you through to KU?’ might have inquired the genial manager, Mr. W. H. Hatcher, *circa* 1850, of Mr. Jackson, the superintendent.

‘Not yet, sir; there’s want of continuity on the stop E, and full earth on the HN’ (*i.e.*, the left-hand wire to Normanton is broken, and the right-hand wire touches the earth).

‘What are you doing with the CW’s?’

‘Sending them to MI (Rugby) to go on by train.’

‘What is wrong? How is the ZM?’

‘High wind and heavy rain in Derbyshire. I think the linemen are shifting a pole.’

Diarial entry: “11.30, line right. KU reading well.”

Then an unofficial conversation by telegraph—

‘How many CW’s at IK?’ asks KU, about 180 miles away.

‘Twenty-three,’ replies IK.

‘All right ; will clear you out.’

Joy overspreads at IK the face of J. M., aged fifteen. He signals ‘ZL’ (all being messages for stations beyond Normanton, otherwise he would have sent ZD), and away fly the CW’s, the double-needle rattling like the stones of Cheapside under the wheels of Mrs. Gilpin’s chaise. All twenty-three messages are taken without a single ‘Not understand.’

‘Good ! good ! good !’ signals IK, in a paroxysm of praise.

There were two spots within the telegraphic area which were not the most ardently desired of telegraphists—Normanton in Yorkshire, and Carstairs on the Caledonian line in Scotland. The former included a railway-station and hotel ; the latter, in early years at all events, little more than a signal-box.

All the clerks were extremely young and very frugally paid. Their ages ranged from sixteen to eighteen ; they had a guinea a week apiece. A few graybeards who had attained a score of years had perhaps some shillings more, while a Methuselah of five-and-twenty, who was the clerk-in-charge, might even enjoy a weekly stipend of a couple of guineas. The latter post and pay were, however, the prizes of the profession, and not to be reached at a single bound.

The work was wonderfully well done considering. These youngsters, especially at Normanton, had nothing else to think of. The office at that station was a grimy room on a bridge built over the yard.

Normanton owed its importance to the junction of four trunk lines of three great railway companies. Some of its public glory may have departed since the days when passengers habitually broke their journey there and slept at the station hotel. But in another way Normanton is a vaster place than ever, with a traffic which no figures can measure. Yet the social gaiety of this railway stronghold is even now not very far from what it was in the remote days of old KU.

Here we transmitted for the North, for YO, KM, EL, and FO, *i.e.*, for York, Newcastle, Edinburgh, and Glasgow, the last being the Ultima Thule. Sometimes in fine, dry weather IK could work to KM; and a dim recollection is preserved of seeing, on one hot August Saturday afternoon, on the dial-plate at Lothbury faint deflections from FO.

But Normanton was our frontier point. Beyond we might penetrate by chance. It did not, however, pay to work slowly, with weakened signals, into a dim and misty distance, and to stations only known to us by tradition.

So Normanton 'took' for Hull and Leeds; for York, Newcastle, Edinburgh, and Glasgow, and for the town and county of Berwick-upon-Tweed. In those days, as no other towns of importance were known to the telegraph clerks, could it be that they did not exist? Where were Greenock, Inverness and Aberdeen, Dundee, and the towns in Fife? Where the Hartlepoons, Darlington, and Middlesbrough? Bristol we had heard of, because every Saturday at noon a stock-

broking message was sent round by Birmingham to go by train from Gloucester to the great town in the West. But Cardiff and South Wales—we knew them not!

At Normanton, amongst a galaxy of fine double-needle readers, shone a bright and particular star, F. C. He was dark, young, small, and slender; self-contained, gentle in his ways, and a most consummate reader. He could read off the double-needle, it was thought, with his eyes shut—even perhaps during a needful nap! Fifty words a minute, as fast as the fastest sender could work, he, with good signals, was supposed to be able to read with ease. But his glory was to read when signals were bad.

Imagine two clock-faces, each with a single hand, standing side by side, the needle when at rest pointing to 12 o'clock. When in action, the needles shall singly, or both together, beat against ivory pins set a little way to the right and left respectively—say at 2 minutes *past* 12 to the right-hand, and at 2 minutes *to* 12 on the left. That was the normal state of things; and then distracting wobbles, numbering at top speed 400 to 500 a minute, *i.e.*, at an average of five letters to a word, and two deflections to a letter, sometimes of both needles in parallel deflections, sometimes of one needle reversing between its pins, had to be instantaneously deciphered.

To read the vibrations of one needle, even when the deflections are well defined, seems at first sight sufficiently difficult; but how it was that the signs of two needles moving together, or rapidly changing

from one to the other, did not bewilder the reading-clerk is a mystery. It is still possible for me to read at the rate of twenty words—that is, 200 deflections—a minute. So recently as August 1, 1898, the day of my quitting the Post-Office, one of the Assistant-Controllers—Mr. H. Smith—‘sent’ to me a few words on the double-needle telegraph in my room, which he found were easy to me to read. This was my last act at the General Post-Office. It is not a little singular that the identical instrument (as I believe it to be) which I was the first to put in action at the old Post-Office in 1848, should forty-five years later bid me farewell at the new one.

When the signals were bad, distractions arose in three ways: (1) One needle would deflect strongly, the other scarcely at all; (2) one or both needles would be in contact; *i.e.*, the messages of other wires would to some extent leak into our wires and impart irrational pulsations, which had nothing to do with, and only confused, the work in hand; or (3) nine-tenths of the current sent from London would run down the wet posts into the earth, or dissipate into the moist air of the Midland counties, and only a fraction would find its way to Yorkshire and feebly actuate the needles there.

Then was F. C. seen at his best. As photography discovers stars which no telescope can reveal to the human retina, so F. C. could read where no signal could be seen by ordinary telegraphists. Those are the days of the far-away past. The double-needle

has long since gone to the tomb of the Capulets, although contacts and full earth, the aurora borealis and earth-currents, still play their merry pranks in the regions of telegraphy.

In the gallery below the instrument room was set up the Intelligence Department. Over that branch of the service there ruled from 1846 to the close of the Telegraph Company's career in 1870 a kindly autocrat, Mr. C. V. Boys. His must have been an arduous post. It was certainly a responsible one. To compose the 'morning express' (a summary of news for the provinces) before 7 a.m., to write an evening version at six o'clock, was well-nigh equal to the composition of two original discourses per diem. Then, between whiles, to keep his mind going, London produce, and coal and corn markets, the arrivals of cotton in the Mersey and of shipping in the Thames, were always to the fore; and in the evening, four times a week, six months out of twelve, an outline of the debates in Parliament had to be provided. However, he did it all, and did it well, for a quarter of a century.

There were two great events each week-day, and two greater still twice a year, to quicken our pulses. At noon and four o'clock the mid-day and closing prices of the London Stock Exchange were sent, under the title of 'Funds.' To these reports all else gave way. No matter how many costly messages, prepaid at an average of 10s. or 12s. each, were waiting to go off, 'Funds' took priority of all.

Twice a year we had the Queen's Speech, at the

opening and closing of the Session. That was the 'Derby' of IK and of LY too. The witchery has worn off now. But in double-needle days each station was agog to beat the others.

'Look out for Queen's Speech' came from London, and in the country offices all was hushed excitement. The needles were newly magnetized, pencils by the dozen newly sharpened, pad upon pad of blacks and flimsies prepared, and the best readers, the swiftest writers, told off for duty. Then came DQ: 'My—Lords—and—Gentlemen——'

To what purpose now for offices to race? How is the 'sunder,' at 30 words a minute, to chase the 'Wheatstone,' with perforated slip, ready to run through, at 300?

After a few years business grew apace; the old building in Founders' Court could no longer contain the exuberant child to which telegraphy had already grown, the Electric Telegraph Company added 'International' to their title, laid a cable to the Hague, and built themselves a yet more spacious central station in a narrow street behind, which, however, still was styled LY. Here, on February 5, 1870, the Post-Office, like a bolt from the blue, startled its tenants.

Meanwhile, with the Electric and International Company I spent several years until, in 1855, the good friends who had helped me once did so again, and brought me back to the Post-Office, not as the official of the Telegraph Company, but as an established officer of the Postmaster-General.



PART II.

CHAPTER VI.—ST. MARTIN'S-LE-GRAND.

CHAPTER VII.—THE MODUS OPERANDI.

CHAPTER VIII.—THE MINISTER.

CHAPTER IX.—THE EXECUTIVE.

CHAPTER X.—PILLARS OF THE LAW.



CHAPTER VI.

ST. MARTIN'S-LE-GRAND.

IN 1855 traditions of Lombard Street as the old General Post-Office still flavoured the service, although Sir R. Smirke's fine building in St. Martin's-le-Grand had been occupied for more than a quarter of a century. Sir Francis Freeling, Bart., the famous Secretary who under George IV. and William IV. held office continuously for thirty-eight years and a month, had passed away nineteen years earlier; his successor, Lieutenant-Colonel William Leader Maberly, whose name is still remembered by veterans, had gone into an honourable retirement as a Commissioner of Audit; Rowland Hill sat in the curule chair; Lord Canning wore the purple.

So it happened that Sir Rowland (then plain Mr.), as Secretary, gave me my nomination, and Lord Canning, as Postmaster-General, my appointment; and April 18, 1855, found me settled on the establishment of the Post-Office.

Mr. (now Sir John) Tilley and Mr. Frederic Hill,

the latter of whom had relinquished the congenial work of inspecting prisons in order to help in the development of his brother's plans, were the Assistant-Secretaries. After more than sixty years of public work, Sir John Tilley, K.C.B., is an active member of the municipality; and in his ninety-first year Mr. Frederic Hill, hale and hearty at Hampstead, has published his Autobiography.* Under these eminent men the department flourished.

The General Post-Office, built in 1829, stands in half a dozen parishes, those bearing the picturesque names of St. John Zachary and St. Michael-le-Querne amongst them. The site covers 2 acres; the clearance for building operations displaced a thousand inhabitants, or at the rate of seven tenants for each house. It swept away congeries of alleys, courts and thoroughfares, though, to satisfy public opinion and to facilitate postal business, a passage-way for pedestrians was maintained through the building itself, down to my time.

Under the roof of Smirke's spacious, solid and classic fabric all the branches were housed, except the Money-Order Office, which, under the control of Mr. F. R. Jackson, occupied a building on the western side of Aldersgate Street. The Sorting-Offices were chiefly on the ground-floor of the Post-Office; those of the management above.

The central hall, entered by the grand portico, dwells in my memory. On its north side were to

* Richard Bentley and Son, 1898.

be found the Inland and Foreign Letter Offices, the former being governed by an Inland President, whose desk, of portentous size, remains to this day. The Inland Office, or sorting-place of letters for provincial distribution, has since been renamed the Circulation Office, but it is still familiarly known by its former title, which is perhaps the better of the two.

In May, 1851, the Honourable the House of Commons became strangely concerned in the cost of gas at the Post-Office. They ordered a return, which was not without interest. In the year ended January 5, 1848, the total charge was over £3,000. By January, 1851, the gas-bill had been reduced one half. To this result three successive abatements of 1s. per 1,000 feet made by the gas company contributed £824, and 'the use of Mr. Leslie's patents for the purification, etc., of gas' £739 more. So it would appear that the Post-Office in the year 1847-8 burnt about 5,108 thousands of feet of gas, and paid for the same at the high rate of nearly 12s. per 1,000 feet.

A long time ago an anecdote of the Inland Office was related to me, which, however, must be repeated with all reserve. One day (so the story ran), more than forty years since, certain bags lay unopened on the floor. Surrounding them, at a respectful distance, stood a ring of sorters. No one cared to touch these bags. Cholera, they said, was rife in the place from which they came. A cordon had been formed around

the infected town ; the mails alone were allowed to pass out ; purifying bonfires blazed in the streets.

Naturally, the sorting staff felt somewhat chary of opening bags of so uncomfortable an origin. There lay the mails, and near at hand were the merchants' clerks loudly calling for their letters. All this soon came to the ears of the Postmaster-General of the day. He made short work of it. Going into the Inland Office, his lordship called for a knife to cut the bags open and turn out the letters. But this was too much for stout English hearts to see unmoved. The hesitation of the moment was cast aside. With a cheer the sorters flung themselves on the bags, and forthwith sorted off the contents in their best style.

On the south side of the hall there flourished the Twopenny Post. It was at this date just as much a penny post as its bigger brother on the north side, but having once been lawfully possessed of this distinctive title, it tenaciously clung to it as a survival of the past. The Twopenny Post-Office at St. Martin's-le-Grand was the London District Office, through which in the earliest years of my service every letter posted in London for delivery in the Metropolis passed, and from which, indeed, all letters for London were delivered.

Over these chief branches — Inland, Foreign, and London District — Mr. William Bokenham held long and undisputed sway. He was an official of the old régime, who had honestly and faithfully considered penny postage a bad thing for the revenue, and had

opposed it. But when Parliament and the country resolved on its adoption, he threw all his energies into the scale to make the new plan a success, and was a trusted coadjutor of Sir Rowland Hill to the last.

Up a bold flight of stairs were the offices of the secretariat. Mr. Rowland Hill occupied a room in the front of the building on the first-floor, to the south of the portico. Lord Canning's offices were almost exactly below.

An apartment on a higher floor was used as a bedroom for an officer styled the Clerk-in-waiting. In 1848, general rioting being expected in the City, a keg of gunpowder was taken on to the leads, perhaps in case the building should be garrisoned by the military. To keep the powder dry, it was stowed away in safety under the roof. There it lay for several years forgotten. Many a night it has happened to me as the Clerk-in-waiting for the nonce to sleep under the said keg, unconscious of what might be the effect of a chance spark from the chimney close by.

The Clerks-in-waiting took charge of the department between 4 p.m. and 10 a.m., armed with full authority, and sometimes having to use their discretion under a sense of heavy responsibility. Mr. Frederic Hill relates how Lord Hardwick, guided by his recollection of discipline on board ship, gave orders, as Postmaster-General, that these functionaries should be told 'All's well!' at four o'clock in the after-

noon, and directed to report 'All's well !' at ten o'clock next day.

On the occasion of another threatened riot and attack upon the Post-Office, a plentiful supply of empty white stone ink-jars was carried to the roof, as safer, on the whole, in the hands of our doughty special constables, and less likely to explode than the villainous saltpetre. Happily, no rioters appeared. Nor did they do so many years later in Fenian times, when a valiant corps of gentlemen-at-arms mustered early on a Sunday morning in the vacant rooms of the Post-Office to defend the old building, if need were, to the bitter end.

The central hall was very lofty. Its grandeur, however, lay in massive granite columns lining either side. In an aisle behind them, and through wooden panels in the wall, the public posted or registered an occasional letter, or bought a few unperforated postage - stamps. They did so with more or less timidity, and seldom without a stealthy survey, as doubting what might happen when they knocked at the panel, which, though not poetic, had its merits and its use. Swiftly shot across the field of view, it was sometimes a salutary—at all times an effective—check when undue remonstrance needed a curb.

At night, as the big hall clock drew on to the hour of six, and especially on Friday, when the American mail was despatched, the central hall wore an animated aspect. Onlookers who came to post their

letters, but stopped to see the sight, thickened into a crowd; public excitement grew apace. Vociferous cries of 'Stand back!' and 'Clear the way!' from the hall constables resounded. At the first stroke of six expectation was at fever-heat. Belated messengers rushed up with sacks of newspapers, and merchants' clerks with letters by the score, until at the sixth great shock of sound a universal shout, followed by a glorious bang of all letter-boxes and windows, announced the closing of the post.

Tumultuous was the merriment when some unpractised person, reserving his newspaper until the last second, but apparently breathless with haste, hurled it at the open window, only to miss his aim, and see the outcast packet lie ignominiously on the floor of the hall.

This central hall, up to the end of the sixties, was freely used as a thoroughfare by pedestrians. Being in a direct line, on the one hand, with the shops and alleys (now displaced) on the western side of St. Martin's-le-Grand, and Gutter Lane and the City by-ways on the other, it was a tempting short-cut for people bent on saving time.

Why the Metropolitan public, usually so tenacious of its rights, real or imaginary, yielded meekly to the shutting up of this ancient thoroughfare is still unexplained. The process was effected very cleverly. First the big doors at back and front were closed, leaving only an inconvenient sideways; then, after a time, that was closed too, and the Post-Office entered

on its conquest—viz., an enormous quadrangle in the centre of the Post-Office, just where space was most urgently required. Afterwards at the Cheapside end the yard itself was closed, and the public were relegated altogether to other routes.

April 18, 1855, is fresh in my mind. Someone had told me that the official hours were from ten to four, and the central hall saw me ready to ascend the secretarial staircase and begin work so early as 9.40 a.m.; but even when the hall clock struck ten the brand new clerk paused awhile, thinking that a too punctual attendance would excite a smile. Ten minutes late, however, he presented himself to a principal functionary, and by him was remitted for initiation to a lieutenant—a spare, grizzled, but kindly if sententious official, evidently one of the props and pillars of the establishment.

A sense of the proprieties, however, was speedily shocked by finding that my Mentor was briefly and unceremoniously addressed by the gilded and irreverent youth of the Secretary's office as 'Joe.'

'Come and sign the attendance-book,' said he. 'What time did you get here?'

'Ten minutes past ten.'

'What! ten minutes late to start with! I say, young fellow, that's a bad go off.'

Mr. Joseph was quite right; his was a wholesome admonition. The 'go off' might have been better. It was an indifferent beginning, though not due to sloth on my part. However, I took the admonition

to heart, and did not arrive late again—certainly for the next ten years, if then.

The secretariat occupied nearly the whole of the first floor south of the portico, looking on to St. Martin's-le-Grand in front and to the church of St. Vedast Foster in the lane behind. It happened that in the fifties there were still in the Secretary's office several young men whose fathers had won distinction in literature or on the stage. They were appointed, perhaps, by a Postmaster-General who in some special and particular way had been a patron of letters and the drama.

Several of these sprightly young men and their friends were in the habit of supping together, as was very generally the custom in the fifties, at Evans's, in Covent Garden. Douglas Jerrold, though an older man, would occasionally join them. One of the fraternity was a brilliant entertainer then rising into popularity. His amiable foible was an easy reference in conversation to the great houses to which he was invited as a guest. One night he was later than usual, but, on coming to the supper-table, explained that he had been out to dine at the house of the Marquis of L——. 'Was it not strange, boys!' he observed, 'we had no fish for dinner.'

'What!' exclaimed Douglas Jerrold, 'was it all eaten *upstairs*!'

Occasionally, in the Large Room, at slack moments, Mr. Harold Power would give acceptable impersonations of the chief magistrates at Bow Street. But we

never found ourselves in similar plight to that of the commissariat clerk of the War Office in Peninsula times, who, seated on his high stool, was pulling out the drawers of his desk as organ-stops, and giving a musical performance, to the joy of his colleagues, instead of sending out orders for the shipment of stores, when he became aware, by a sudden silence in the room, that something was amiss. He looked over his shoulder, only to find the dread Sir Arthur Wellesley regarding him sternly and in the act of exclaiming, 'This is why I can't get my tents and my boots.'

Mr. William James Page, in the Foreign and Colonial Branch, and Mr. Arthur Benthall, in the Home Mails Branch, were regarded, and justly so, as the foremost men after the Secretaries. While Mr. W. Bokenham controlled London, Mr. Thomas Boucher, a singularly able official, assisted him.

The coming man appeared to be Mr. Edward Page, Inspector-General of Mails; but his health failed, and he retired from the service while he was yet, as years went, in his prime.

The man who was really coming, but who had not then made the mark he afterwards made, was Mr. Frank Ives Scudamore, an official of untiring energy and unusual ability, and of whom some account will presently be given.

At the head of the Surveyors was Mr. William John Godby, who had been appointed to his post when the tale of the thirties was barely told, and was still there,

as efficient and esteemed as ever, when the first stroke of the nineties was about to sound.

'I visited,' records Sir Rowland Hill, writing of 1851, 'the more important towns in the West Riding of Yorkshire, where I discussed with Mr. Godby, the Surveyor, numerous demands for improvement.' Nearly forty years later again a Secretary of the Post-Office was discussing with his invaluable colleague, 'Mr. Godby, the Surveyor,' the bearings of various 'demands for improvements.'

In the Jubilee year, Mr. Warren, also for many years a Surveyor, told me that just before uniform postage was resolved on, he had partly prepared a schedule of charges based on distance, and had handed it over to Mr. Godby, then a Surveyor's clerk, to complete.

So we planned a little pleasantry. 'Mr. Godby,' I wrote in formal terms, 'when will the schedule of postage rates be ready which was ordered by the Secretary in August, 1839, and handed to you by Mr. Warren to complete?' The old surveying hand was more than equal to the occasion. He said it was completed and sent in by up night mail the day before it was due; 'and when may I expect,' inquired he, 'to receive a warrant in payment of the overtime which I spent in preparing it?'

Mr. Godby stood midway in a line of three generations, Mr. Augustus Godby, the father, having been Secretary of the Post-Office in Ireland; Mr. William John Godby, the son, having been a Surveyor for

fifty years; and Mr. W. H. Godby, the grandson, being at this moment Postmaster of Gloucester.

His long service necessarily gave him great experience, and he was a member, usually the chairman, of many departmental committees of importance. Almost to the last his health and vigour were phenomenal. He had his headquarters at Shrewsbury, and it was little more than pastime for him to leave home in the early morning and spend, when required, the greater part of the official day at the General Post-Office in close discussion.

These were some of the able men with whose aid Sir Rowland Hill engrafted his plans on the Post-Office, inspired it with zeal which has never cooled or slackened, and laid the foundation of an abounding prosperity.

There is no doubt that Sir Rowland was an ideal Secretary of the Post-Office. He had not only a powerful mind and a genius for administration, but it was the emanation of his own brain that he had to fashion into concrete form.

Although technically a subordinate official, he was so backed up by public opinion as to become, when at last full Secretary, master of the situation. As long as his health—never robust—lasted, he was probably a match for any hostile superior. Until the last years of service he can scarcely be said to have had one. When his health failed, the tussle with Lord Stanley of Alderley, it is believed, tried him a good deal.

After Sir Rowland Hill came Sir John Tilley. He

had been the senior Assistant-Secretary, and so stepped into his chief's shoes. Sir John possessed vast experience. He had entered the postal service some time in the twenties, had been for many years a Surveyor, and had an intimate knowledge of all the branches of the department which none has ever excelled. To his initiative is due the erection of the block of buildings which directly face the General Post-Office, about to be devoted solely to telegraphic purposes.

When Sir John retired, to lead an active life in voluntary employment in municipal affairs, the late Sir Arthur Blackwood, then Financial Secretary, came to be Secretary-in-chief. Sir Arthur was originally a Treasury officer. He had seen service in a civil capacity in the Crimean War, and had acquired a large insight into the financial relations of the Treasury with Parliament before he received his appointment as Financial Secretary at the General Post-Office.

With pain and sorrow the word 'late' is written before the name of this good, high-minded man. It is but too probable that he fell a victim to a sense of duty, labouring as he did to the last as an official faithfully at his post in St. Martin's-le-Grand, and in his private capacity as a fearless exponent of the truths of religion as he received them. Sir Arthur presided at the Mildmay Evangelical Conference of 1893, after a severe attack of illness, when he should have been at home and at rest. He told me before-

hand that he meant to attend the meeting, but that his doctor had forbidden him to speak for more than two minutes.

The president of a congress, however, in one of the main speeches of the occasion, could hardly limit himself to so short a space of time. But Sir Arthur Blackwood smilingly brushed aside any subsequent allusion to the matter, probably believing in his heart that the joy of once more taking part in the great annual gathering of a spiritual brotherhood, which had had its rise in Chipping Barnet thirty years before, and with which he had been long associated, was worth any risk to health and life.

His instincts were kindly, as the subjoined letter, written when influenza held me down, will show :

' January 18, 1892.

' MY DEAR BAINES,

' Pray take whatever leave is necessary. Your heart is, I know, at the Post-Office, and you will be, I fear, only too eager to return.

' I am back at work to-day for the first time for three weeks, having also had an attack, though, I am thankful to say, only a slight one.

' Yours has evidently been much more serious, and I thoroughly sympathize with you.

' Hoping that you will take all care, and be soon quite re-established,

' Yours sincerely,

' S. A. BLACKWOOD.'

My late chief called me into his room at St. Martin's-le-Grand for the last time on Tuesday, August 1, 1893, at about half-past two o'clock in the afternoon.

We met in the corridor as he came up the private staircase from Mr. Arnold Morley's room. Taking me by the arm, he explained to me the details of a revision of the Secretary's office, which he had probably just settled with the Postmaster-General. Then he gave me to read a letter from the Treasury settling the terms of my own retirement, said a few kindly words of sympathy and regret at official separation, and did his best to soften a Treasury decision which negated what he had recommended, and what had seemed to others to be a not unreasonable proposal.

As I left the room, and turned to close the door, he kissed his hand in mute farewell, and that was the last that I saw of Stevenson Arthur Blackwood, Knight Commander of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath, Secretary of her Majesty's Post-Office. He died two months later at Harwich on Monday, October 2, 1893, on the very day probably on which he hoped to resume duty at the Post-Office, only living long enough, after a toilsome Continental journey in search of the health which never came, to regain the English coast.

Ten happy years at the Post-Office were spent by me directly under his hand. As Assistant-Secretary, it was my duty to see him from 1882 to 1892 almost every day. We fell into a swift and comparatively silent method of transacting business which suited both, such being varied only by a cheery remark from him; for his spirits, if not exuberant, were always

good, and rose to any humorous aspect which official papers sometimes presented. It is comforting to think that while he gave me all possible support in such proposals of mine as he approved of, I, on the other hand, tried to save him all avoidable trouble in submitting papers for his consideration, and in conducting the arrangements of the inland mail service placed in my charge.

Deep-seated as were Sir Arthur Blackwood's religious convictions, and ready as he was to open his mind on the strength or weakness of any form of moral teaching which came under his notice, he forced his own views uninvited on none. In official matters he was absolutely uninfluenced by theological tenets.

His tastes were, as far as they were known to me, few and simple. The service of the Most High, whether at the desk or on the platform, was clearly his one aim. He found many ways of fighting the good fight. The cause of temperance, or, rather, total abstinence from intoxicants, he lost no chance of furthering; but in his own case he would take hilariously any trifling *jeu d'esprit* which told against him or his cherished principle.

This, by the way, was one of the secrets of the charm of Sir Arthur's manner. He was never offended by what was not meant to offend, and was always ready to see the amusing side of things. Any gathering of the employes of the Post-Office had his sympathies at once. He was good, at the shortest



SIR ARTHUR BLACKWOOD, K.C.B.,
SECRETARY OF THE POST-OFFICE.
(Ob. 1898.)



notice, for an evening with a telegraph messengers' institute in any part of London, or, if business allowed, for a scamper on the trial trip of a new parcel-coach a score or two of miles out of town, or of a mail-steamer on the coast.

If a memorial had to be planned or publicly dedicated to a lamented Postmaster - General, he was to the fore, subscribing and assisting. If an opening presented itself for widening the basis of a great benevolent fund, there was he to encourage and suggest. He had the happy faculty of making official business work smoothly, and the labours of his subordinates pleasurable in the last degree.

Sir Arthur Blackwood will be remembered as a man of sterling worth, who, like Sir Henry Lawrence in India, in all the relations of life, tried to do his duty. An article in the *Birmingham Daily Post* described him as 'the help and comforter, not only of the poor in goods and circumstances, but of the poor in spirit likewise; and it was,' so the writer declared, 'to the task of raising the timid and distrustful to hope and exertion that he devoted himself entirely.' What nobler inscription could be traced upon his tomb?

Some months after these lines were written, Mr. Buxton Forman circulated amongst a limited number of friends a monograph of great beauty, descriptive of what he felt about Sir Arthur Blackwood. The two accounts, written independently, are identical in their

views, but Mr. Forman having enjoyed more opportunities than were open to me of obtaining a thorough insight into Sir Arthur's character, has been able to write with greater weight of personal knowledge. He has borne warm testimony (as I would do) to 'his beautiful, cheerful disposition . . . the fine buoyancy and hilarity which were so striking,' and to his 'wholesome subordination of mere reason to moral conviction and righteous impulse.'

In the autumn of 1893, Mr. Spencer Walpole resigned the responsible position of Governor of the Isle of Man to take up the onerous duties of Secretary of the Post-Office. He is fortunate in finding as his coadjutors men of tried capacity and long official service. Mr. Algernon Turnor, C.B., the present Financial Secretary, spent some years under the eye of Lord Beaconsfield; Mr. Herbert Joyce, C.B., has given forty years to the Post-Office. The senior Assistant-Secretaries, Mr. J. C. Lamb, C.M.G., and Mr. Lewin Hill, possess ripe experience.

Between the accession of Mr. Rowland Hill to the Secretaryship and the present day there have been vast changes in the Post-Office, on some of which these pages will in due course especially dwell. Perhaps the reduction of foreign and colonial postages, towards which Mr. Frederic Hill did much; the institution of Post-Office Savings Banks, wherein Mr. Scudamore, C.B., and Mr. Chetwynd, C.B., came to the fore; the acquisition of the telegraphs, the introduction of postal orders, and the establishment

of the parcel post have been amongst the most conspicuous.

In another chapter reference is more particularly made to the services of Mr. Scudamore. At this point it seems proper to mention that, next only to him in ability, unflagging application, and acquaintance with the principles and details of Post-Office business, was his successor in the post of Receiver and Accountant-General, the late Mr. George Chetwynd, formerly of the Money-Order Office. Mr. Chetwynd's name is identified with the organization of the Savings Bank, the introduction of the daily account, the analysis of the earnings of the telegraph companies, phases of the transfer of the telegraphs, and the adoption of postal orders. A large share of the work must, at least, in each case be ascribed to him.

Who it is that absolutely originates a new and practicable idea is almost always more or less matter of doubt. Many people at different dates propound novel but impracticable schemes, and at length the crude thought embodied in such as are worthy to survive is moulded by some master hand into a feasible plan, while it rarely happens, of course, that an official carries out a work single-handed. He may bear the brunt of the labour, but others necessarily assist.

How much of the first three considerable achievements was exclusively Mr. Chetwynd's work, and how far Mr. Scudamore shared the labour, or contributed original thought, may be open to conjecture. The

latter told me that he and Mr. Chetwynd had planned the daily account while one day waiting for the train at Cannon Street.

How far the merit of introducing the postal order lies with Mr. Chetwynd, or is due to Mr. Frederic Hill, is matter of opinion ; the latter was the earlier in the field, and brought the project to an advanced stage ; the former overcame whatever difficulty stopped the way, and carried it to completion.

As regards the Savings Bank measure, Sir Rowland Hill has recorded that the machinery for giving effect to it was devised by Messrs. Scudamore and Chetwynd. This agrees with my own recollection. In most things these two able men worked cordially together. But a letter lies before me in which the writer, a high and competent authority, affirms that 'the machinery of the Post-Office Savings Bank is undoubtedly Chetwynd's.' This much is certain, that Mr. Chetwynd was either principal or accessory in bringing several great public works to fruition. He died while still in the prime of life. A few years before his death he was made a Companion of the Bath.

A memorial bust in white marble has been placed by his former colleagues in the room which for many years he occupied at the Post-Office.

A valued coadjutor and faithful henchman of Mr. Scudamore and Mr. Chetwynd was the late Mr. Samuel Walliker, my colleague for many years, whose merits were of a high order, and whose energy,

always at high pressure, was almost inexhaustible. A principal in the Money-Order Office (Sir Rowland Hill refers to good work done in that office by him as far back as 1849 or 1850), an excellent accountant, an Honorary Quarter-Master of the Civil Service Rifles, Postmaster of Hull, Postmaster of Birmingham, he did well in all that fell to him to do ; he was justly valued for official qualifications, and was trusted all round. Moreover, everyone liked him. His heart was kind to the innermost core. Half the joy which he felt in doing good probably lay in the fact that the benefited could make no return. A colleague whose wits were going, joyless old souls in workhouses, the poor, the helpless, the sorrowful, the orphan, they were the clients after whom his generous soul hungered.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MODUS OPERANDI.

My aim in this chapter is to make clear the ways of the Post-Office, to show how the machinery works, how each part is kept smoothly in motion, how every servant has his well-defined task.

As these words are written, it is six o'clock on a winter's evening. Let us take a Pisgah view of the post at this moment throughout the United Kingdom.

The rural messengers are hurrying through country lanes or along the highway to the head post-town, each laden with a wallet full of letters, post-parcels, and the like.

In the towns active postmen, bag across the shoulder, are intent on clearing the pillar-boxes of letters for the night despatch ; outside the head post-offices the public are posting correspondence to all parts of the world ; within them the sorting office is redolent of sealing-wax, is thronged with officials and bestrewn with empty bags.

At six o'clock the Limited 'up' night mail train from Aberdeen and Glasgow for London flies through





Wishaw Junction, and the 'up' special, which—carrying none but postal officials and consisting of none but postal letter and parcel sorting-vans—becomes before leaving Scotland a train of great length, is now halfway between Perth and Stirling, thundering after the Limited at 50 miles an hour.

The *Princess Victoria* is in Larne harbour preparing to steam swiftly across the Irish Sea with the Belfast mails for Stranraer. In an hour the bright light off Larne will be well down astern in the north-west and the beacon at the entrance of Loch Ryan will open up straight ahead.

Her bigger sister, the *Ireland*, belonging to the Holyhead service, is warped alongside the Carlisle pier at Kingstown, having landed her passengers and the down day mail and the parcel mail from England; while the *Leinster* lies on the eastern side of the pier, patiently gathering breath for the return trip with the Irish night mail for Holyhead.

The north mail-train from Penzance and Plymouth for the Severn Tunnel route dashes through Tiverton Junction on its way to Hereford and Crewe; and at Newcastle-on-Tyne the station superintendent begins to think of marshalling the mail-train for York and King's Cross.

All over the United Kingdom postal bees, though the daylight has departed, are busily at work. A third, or a half of them, it may be, have finished making honey for the day, and are snugly housed in the domestic hive. But perhaps 60,000 men and women



are doing their best to punctually despatch the night mail as the main business of the twenty-four hours.

How in St. Martin's-le-Grand? The great building on the west is plunged in silence and darkness, except its topmost floors, which are brilliantly lighted and thronged with telegraphists. The expresses for the country newspapers are being flashed along the circuits, Parliamentary reports are just upon the wires. But for the rest, a solitary taper may twinkle in the room of the Clerk-in-waiting. Perchance, for tranquillity of thought, he has turned out the electric lamp and is smoking the cigarette of contentment or the tranquil pipe; is meditating the evening meal, or reviewing that problem of which his branch has yet to find the solution. Gone to the House is the Chief of all postmen; to their homes the lesser lights; the stealthy watchmen pervade the corridors; the fire brigade unwind the hose.

Northward, the moonlight plays fantastic tricks with the new building, fast ripening into completion, the theatre, perhaps, of events so great in the future history of the Post-Office as to pale even the effectual fires of the past.

Opposite—how there? Shades of honoured Bokenham and Boucher and Jeffery, how spiritedly the men still work! O Mellersh of the steadfast mind! O Tombs of the cheerful brow! these were once the merry men all; and the forceful example ye set in the old days still inspires the crowd.

What are these cries of 'Oxford,' 'York,' 'Birming-



ham,' 'Crewe,' which salute the ear in the eastern lobby at the back of the building? what is the meaning of the bustle and turmoil on which the Goldsmiths' Hall looks down with superb unconcern? The bags from provincial towns are being checked off, and the 'down' night mail is in process of sortation. 130,000 letters, newspapers, and books have been posted at the General Post-Office during the day, of which 20,000 have come through the slits of the great box under the clock during the last quarter of an hour, the huge wicker baskets within having been refilled to overflowing as fast as they could be emptied and replaced.

As though this were not enough, 200,000 postal packets, specially collected by Post-Office vans from newsagents and the Government offices, add to the mass. Mails are arriving by cartloads.

Is even this the full measure of an evening's work at the Post-Office? Far from it! The total will not fall short of 1,200,000 postal packets. The bag-room has to supply for the night mail 5,500 bags to contain the correspondence; for the whole day's work 20,000 bags are required.

London itself, as all the world knows, is divided into eight postal districts, under a plan framed by Sir Rowland Hill, reported on by a committee of officers on July 4, 1855, and worked out by Mr. Boucher. Each district is a post-town complete in itself. The Eastern Central district, or City portion, is certainly the busiest. More than 900 postmen are needed to deliver its letters.

Some devoted statistician has reckoned that in the whole of the Metropolis postmen walk 46,000 miles daily. The calculation is probably within the mark. Say that 700,000,000 letters are delivered annually in the Metropolis ; about 5,500 postmen are engaged in delivering them. Therefore each man delivers about 430 letters a day, and hardly walks less than 10 miles in doing so, looking at the number of deliveries and the walk to and from the sorting office. Here would be 55,000 miles a day. But something must be deducted on account of illness and annual holiday. So a mileage which lies between 40,000 and 50,000 miles a day seems the lowest reasonable estimate.

But E.C., being in the heart of the Metropolis, includes no suburban area. Most other districts do. Let us therefore take the North-Western, which extends from the Euston Road to Mill Hill, as a sample. It is provided with a chief district post-office near Euston Square railway terminus ; it has sub-district post-offices at Kentish Town, Hampstead, Kilburn and elsewhere.

We will post a handful of letters in coloured envelopes at a letter-box in Hampstead, near the Heath, shortly before five o'clock in the afternoon, and see what becomes of them.

Soon the collecting postman with his bag clears the box and carries the contents to the sub-district or postmen's sorting-office in Downshire Hill. The letters are turned out on a table, arranged address

uppermost, struck over the postage stamp with a date in black ink, and sorted.

Our letter for Belsize Square is set aside for inclusion in the next local delivery. The letter for Vere Street and that for Euston Square are tied in a bundle for the North-Western district office. The latter the North-Western district office will deliver locally; the former letter it will send by cart to the Western district office. If the Western letters are very numerous at Hampstead, they go by themselves in a bundle labelled 'W,' but still to the district office—North-West.

Our pink letters for Birmingham, Dublin and Glasgow, as well as those which we posted for Germany and Australia, are easily traced; they are all tied up and labelled, the British letters in bundles corresponding with railway divisions, and the foreign and colonial in others, and sent to the General Post-Office. On arrival, the bag containing them will be cut open, its contents turned out on a table, and the bundles taken direct to their respective divisions, there to be untied and mixed with letters posted under the clock or received from other offices in town and country bags.

Here is the district system in a nutshell.

The Circulation Office itself employs more elaborate mechanism and demands a larger exposition.

We stand in what was once the central hall of the General Post-Office. 10,000 letters lie on each of the six big 'facing' tables in the midst, and at

least 100,000 more letters have yet to come in. They are 'faced' (*i.e.*, turned address upwards), they are divided—the big letters are separated from the ordinary ones, the stray newspapers from both. They are then stamped, and carried for assortment to the Inland Department. There, a first step is to arrange the letters in 28 divisions at the general sorting-table.

Three shelves, one above the other, and the flat surface of the table, each divided into seven spaces, do duty for 28 pigeon-holes; and then begins the process of separating letters from London from those for the provinces, and letters for places abroad from both.

Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that single-rated letters for abroad are freely picked out at the 'facing' table, and this for a curious reason: a single blue stamp of the value of 2½d. represents the uniform single rate of postage under the International Postal Convention, and is a badge which readily catches the eye and enables the sorters quickly to recognise and select such letters.

Twenty-eight neatly-sorted heaps, seven in each row, are found by experience to cover as much space as a sorter can conveniently over-reach.

Where are our pink letters? Like petals of the rose scattered by the wind, they fluttered through the primary sortation—now other distributions await them.

The 28 inland divisions must be sifted and arranged yet again into the inevitable 28. This time they assort themselves into 'roads.'



Read for the benefit of posterity the top line of inscriptions on the sorting-frame in the North-Western railway division, where the second sorting takes place. It runs thus: 'Chester Road, Warrington Road, Preston, Leamington Spa, Wolverhampton, Worcester Road, Blind.'

The pink letter for Birmingham, however, is not to be found in the first row; try the second one: 'Burton Road, Redditch Road, Carnforth Road, Birkenhead Road, Birmingham'—there is the letter, the coloured edge visible behind eight others. We shift it to the front. What next? Away it goes to the Birmingham sorting-table (each great town having a 'road' to itself), there to be tied in one of many bundles and dropped into the Birmingham sack.

Does curiosity desire to know what an average 'road,' where the third sorting takes place, includes? We select the Carlisle Road, and copy from the *vade mecum* prepared by Mr. R. C. Tombs:

'The work on the Carlisle Road consists of the despatch of letters, post-cards, packets, unpaid letters, registered letters, express letters, etc., to the towns of Ambleside, Armathwaite, Aspatria, Burgh-by-Sands, Carlisle, Cockermouth, Coniston, Dalston (Cumberland), Grasmere, Harrington, Kendal, Kirkoswald, Langwathby, Lazonby, Longtown, Maryport, Penrith, Sedburgh, Silloth, Wigton, Windermere.'

Even the Foreign Branch on a higher floor has its 'roads'; for example, the 'West India (Foreign) Road'—('Foreign' to distinguish it from the 'West

India (British) Road'—which includes a dozen or more countries or places: Colon and Panama, which were to have been enriched by the Count de Lesseps' Canal; Ecuador, under a vertical sun; Hayti, now an absolute monarchy, now a negro republic; Chili, far down in the southern seas; Costa Rica, rich in coffee; Peru, which recalls memories of the plate ships of the Spaniard. So also all the landmarks of the Empire, from Fiji to Labrador, the Continent of Australia and the Island of Bombay, the Cape, Calcutta and New Zealand, figure on the walls of the Colonial Branch.

The States of Europe, too? Yes. Constantinople, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Denmark, Norway and Sweden, all have their 'roads.' No privilege is denied to the foreigner.

A line or two of figures seems called for here by way of connecting the several stages of a day's work. A little more than 500,000 letters, a little less than 500,000 newspapers, etc., 10,000 or 11,000 registered letters, and 250,000 foreign and colonial letters, fall into the night mail despatch from the General Post-Office: in all, 1,200,000 postal packets. But taking the mails of the whole day the total is thrice as great. 750,000 letters are sent out for delivery in the Eastern Central district alone, and the grand total for the day must be exalted to 3,600,000 postal packets, exclusive of parcels.

How many officials toil at despatches and arrivals? 2,500 sorters apply themselves daily to the assort-

ment of 3,600,000 letters, newspapers and books at the General Post-Office, and 250 superior officers look after them; nearly 1,300 other persons assist in various ways.

If a man be unpunctual, or a mail-cart be behind time, if a bag be mis-sent, nay, if a letter be left on the floor, the fact is known and investigated; and it is the same in every post-office throughout the United Kingdom, as though there were but a handful of men to be looked after instead of 130,000 persons.

The rule of the Post-Office is, that a report shall be made of every irregularity by the subordinate to his immediate superior. The latter, if need be, passes it on. So the inspector mentions the casual oversight of the rural postman to the head-postmaster, who checks the defaulter for his error, and there the matter ends. But the habitual disregard of regulations would be reported by the postmaster to his Surveyor, by the Surveyor to the Secretary, by the Secretary to the Postmaster-General, whose decision is final. Thus it may happen that infraction of rule in the Mull of Cantyre becomes part of the permanent history of the Post-Office, because the minutes of the Minister are the archives of the department.

The London night mail is the backbone of the circulation of letters throughout the country. Of course there are other principal mails—day mails, mid-day, anticipatory, relief and supplementary mails—but the London night mail is more important than them all.

Given that a letter for a remote village in the North of England or Wales is posted in the South—say at Bournemouth, where this book is written—in time for the noon collection from a town letter-box, the sender may confidently reckon on its delivery about eight o'clock next morning, because it will circulate through London and fall into the night mail despatch.

The night mails are sent off from London at such an hour as to allow of the rural posts being despatched from the head post-towns, as a rule, at six o'clock in the morning; and as the outward walk of the rural postman is completed in two or three hours, there is a tolerable certainty that the night mail letters for a village will come in with the breakfast-tray.

The London night mail train is due on the Border at Carlisle at 3.22 a.m., and Berwick at 4.23. It is due at Holyhead at 5.5, at Carmarthen at 5.15, and at Plymouth at 4.45 a.m. Therefore at almost all the post-towns in England and Wales, even the distant ones, there is a sufficient interval for sorting the incoming night mail before six o'clock in the morning.

A letter for, say, Hadley, in Salop, posted at Bournemouth at noon, would be made up in the fourth day mail for London at 12.55 p.m. It would be enclosed in a bundle for the North-Western railway division, which bundle, on the bag being opened at the General Post-Office, would be taken straight to the divisional table, and thus escape being

commingled with the general mass of unsorted letters. Next it would go through the second and third processes of sortation already described, and eventually 'find itself in the bag for Wellington (Salop), which is sent away from London, not, indeed, by the 'down special' at 8.30, but by the Holyhead mail at 10 p.m. It would branch off from the main line at Stafford, and arrive at Wellington at 2.38 a.m. The mail would be sorted, the town letters separated from the rural ones. The letters for Hadley would be picked out, and despatched by rural postmen at 6 a.m.; they would reach the sub-post-office at 6.35.

Take, again, a letter for Blaenau Festiniog, amongst the slate-quarries of North Wales. The London office would send it, with others, for places lying off the line in a bag which is made up for the Crewe and Bangor Travelling Post-Office. The latter, while rushing on its journey through the darkness of the night, puts all the letters it collects for Blaenau into a bag which arrives there at 6.10 a.m. by branch train from Llandudno Junction.

Once more: on some maps may be found Llanfair Caerinion. Its interests are carefully met. Its night mail is sent from Welshpool by mail-cart, due at 7.20 a.m. The delivery begins at 7.45. So even here, at this remote but considerable village, if letters do not appear at breakfast time, the squire, the vicar, and the doctor, the club and the reading-room, would demand the reason why.

Over the Metropolis and its posts, within a radius

of 10 or 12 miles, the Controller of the London Postal Service at St. Martin's-le-Grand holds sway. Through his hands passes every proposal to alter or amend the London service. Frequency and extent of deliveries, new offices, enlargement of buildings, increase of force; questions of discipline, of pay, of carts and vans, are his immediate concern. He controls and finds staff for the travelling post-offices. There is no one between him and the Secretary. In the whole department none holds a more arduous and responsible post.

How does Mr. J. C. Badcock (the Controller) contrive to bear the burden? With what officers and crew does he keep the head of the great ship *London Postal Service* true to the ordered course, and at all times contrive punctually to deliver her cargo? Good organization and a sufficient staff, a wise delegation of duty and unceasing watchfulness, go far to furnish the reply.

As personal assistants—officers not encumbered with executive functions—the Controller is provided with a Vice-Controller, two assistant Controllers, and six chief Superintendents. These lieutenants are backed up by 76 officers of other grades; so altogether 85 functionaries do what they can to lighten the immediate load of the Controller-in-chief.

Next, all London being parcelled out into eight principal districts, and four minor ones, under post-masters, each of whom has his following of clerks and inspectors, and each an adequate force of postmen,

twelve persons share in the second degree that responsibility which culminates in the Controller. All twelve, for their respective areas, are responsible to the chief; all look to him for counsel and aid; all trim the sails according to the general orders which he gives; all acquaint him with every essential detail.

In short, while 11,583 persons are borne on the vote for the London Postal Service, no fewer than 20,449 persons, including the telegraph staff, obey the beck of the Controller and keep the ship running free. But the cost is great—£1,280,480 a year—to which appreciable sum must be added the charge for cart and van services, viz., £125,000 a year.

These are the means by which the head functionary, responsible to the Secretary and Postmaster-General for efficiently conducting the posts in London, is enabled to regulate the postal navigation, and keep an unfailing look-out on all that concerns the interests of the public in the Metropolis.

An important feature of the sorting service is postal work in trains on the move.

The first travelling post-office—a 'moving post-office' was its earliest title—was established on the Grand Junction Railway between Liverpool and Birmingham on July 1, 1837, and on the completion of the railway to the Metropolis in July, 1838, that office began to ply throughout between London and Liverpool.

The early experience of clerks employed in the travelling post-offices was not always halcyon.

'Sir,' wrote his 'most obedient humble servants, Fredk. W. Karstadt and W. Mellush' ('Mellersh,' probably), to their chief, under date Birmingham, February 16, 1838,—'It becomes our painful duty to report the burning of the Carlisle mail-bag.' The London mail for Liverpool had been duly received at 7.15 a.m. by road through Barnet (108 miles in 11½ hours), and sent on by train. But the coach with the mail for Carlisle had been upset near Daventry, and the bags only came to hand by the Manchester coach at 7.45 a.m., when the train had gone, and gone, too, without the Bristol mail.

Then what was to be done? The two clerks promptly procured an express engine, fastened the bags on a 'larry' between the engine and the post-office, and started on their way at 8.10 a.m. At Whitmore, the furnace-bars were found to be burnt through, and a stoppage ensued. At Crewe the alarming cry was raised of 'Fire!' A hot cinder from the damaged furnace had fallen on the Carlisle sack and set it alight. Fortunately, water was to be had, also paper and string; so the letters, much burnt and defaced, and not, one would suppose, over-dry, were repacked, and the travellers set off again for Warrington. But their troubles were not over. 'The engine was in such a state of inefficiency that we were detained at four different parts of the journey, and at last were obliged to let all the water out of the cistern, into which the tender-man descended to find out what was wrong.'

Coming back, things were no better, for the 'fire and grate of the engine' this time gave way altogether, 'and were precipitated to the ground, nearly causing the train to be turned off the tram.'

However, another train overtook them, which happily was able to push them forward to their destination.

Once—that was on November 26, 1837—George Stephenson's veritable 'coo'—in fact, two cows—got on the line. The train was thrown off the rails, and though it was 'awkward for the coos,' the passengers were only delayed 1 hour and 20 minutes.

Travelling post-offices every night run direct from Euston Square to Aberdeen and Holyhead; from Paddington to Penzance; from Cannon Street to Dover; from Waterloo to Southampton and Dorchester; from Bristol to Newcastle; from Normanton to Shrewsbury, etc. They are in operation also between Dublin and Belfast, and Dublin and Cork.

In the aggregate, upwards of 3,000,000 miles are annually run by these movable offices in traversing the principal railways; about 1,800,000 miles appertain to the London and North-Western and Caledonian railways; about 370,000 miles to the Midland and North-Eastern, nearly 300,000 to the Great Western, and the balance to other lines.

The total number of apparatus-stations in England, Scotland, and Wales is 260, and there are 412 standards and 360 nets erected at these stations for the despatch and receipt of mails. To 132 postal

carriages the apparatus and nets are affixed ; about two-thirds are in daily employment, a third being kept in reserve.

On nearly all the night mail trains, and on some of the day trains, this potent auxiliary of postal despatch is in active use. It fulfils two functions—dropping bags at points at which the mail-train does not stop, and taking others in as it flashes by.

Sir Rowland Hill has described in few words the action of the apparatus for exchanging bags without the stoppage of the train. ‘That which takes place is as follows : The bags to be forwarded, being suspended from a projecting arm at the station, are so knocked off by a projection from the train as to fall into a net which is attached to the mail-carriage, and is for the moment stretched out to receive them ; while, at the same time, the bags to be left behind, being hung out from the mail-carriage, are in like manner so struck off as to be caught in a net fixed at the station, the whole of this complex movement being so instantaneous that the eye cannot follow it.’

A few years ago the department offered premiums for improvements in the form of bag-exchanging apparatus. Some hundreds of designs were sent in. None was adjudged worthy of the first prize, but two received second and third premiums. One proposal struck me as certainly novel and bold.

Given a railway-station at which the mail-train did not stop, and from which bags had nevertheless to be sent on. At the said station a siding, engine, and

mail-van were to be provided, the last-mentioned being furnished with hinged sides capable of being let down to floor-level. The mail-van of the mail-train was to be similarly equipped.

When the mail-train was known to be approaching, say at a speed of 40 or 50 miles an hour, the engine and mail-van in the siding were to be started on a pair of rails carried parallel to the main line for a sufficient distance, and, gradually getting up speed, would, when overtaken, run abreast of the mail-train at an equal pace.

Then, at a signal, both vans would let down their hinged sides, and so form a stable platform, across which the guard would nimbly skip with the outward bags and as nimbly return with the inward ones. The Commissioners for examining designs were able and conscientious men, yet they awarded no prize for this original idea.

So far, we have chiefly considered ingeniously-contrived mechanism. But an equally important function is the assortment of letters while the train is in motion. Owing to this arrangement, letters may be received from the public after the closing of the box at the local post-office, even up to the moment when the mail-train leaves the station; and neighbouring towns on the line of post may exchange correspondence without the necessity of making up direct bags, yet with all the celerity secured by fast trains. It will be obvious that if every post-town made up a bag for every place for



which it had a letter, the service would break down by sheer mass of canvas. The travelling post-office steps in and obviates many difficulties.

More than 1,000 mails daily are transferred between the station-standards and the carriage-nets, and the carriages and the stationary nets. The total number of mail-bags included in these exchanges is estimated at 3,000, and their contents at 150,000 letters, etc., a day. About four-fifths are sorted *en route*, the other fifth being accounted for by bags sent direct from one town to another through the travelling post-offices unopened. The total number of letters, etc., dealt with in the travelling post-offices annually is about 270,000,000, besides 7,000,000 parcels, each of which is accelerated in delivery. There are other sorting carriages under local control, not included in the statement, whose figures would go to swell the totals.

A rotation of sorters is arranged, so that none may be on duty too often or too long.

It is hard to admit that in one respect, at any rate, the views of the Inspector-General of Mails during my term of office in the eighties were less enlightened and advanced than those which found expression in the late thirties. Yet so it was.

In 1838 the London and Birmingham Railway Company had in their service a talented officer of the royal navy, Lieutenant Peter Lecount. He was a mathematician, a writer of sound, easy English, and a civil engineer to boot. He wrote a 'Practical

Treatise on Railways,* and this is how he advised that railway post-offices should be arranged :

‘The mails should be fitted up in conjunction with the Post-Office authorities, divided into two parts. The first is a sleeping-room, where two hammocks are hung up; the other is an office fitted up with drawers and pigeon-holes for the purpose of sorting the letters.’

My former colleagues, if not my readers, may be left to imagine sleeping compartments for the officials in the busy Scotch special train, where every square inch of space is jealously demanded by the letter and parcel work. After all, a sorter from London probably finds greater rest in leaving the train altogether at Carlisle than in being slung up in a hammock and going on to Perth.

A better illustration of the use of travelling post-offices than that supplied by a comparatively recent change can hardly be given. Formerly the day mail-trains on the London and South-Western line left Waterloo at 8.5 a.m. Letters from the North for towns between London and Southampton, etc., were sent for the most part to the Circulation Office to be reassorted, and were not in time for an earlier train.

On April 1, 1890, we arranged with the railway company that the mails and a travelling post-office should be sent by the newspaper train, which leaves Waterloo at 5.50 a.m. But between the arrival of

* Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1889.

the mail-trains at Euston, soon after 4 a.m., and the departure from Waterloo, at 10 minutes to 6, the interval was insufficient for sorting at St. Martin's-le-Grand. So the travelling offices came into play. What letters the towns north of Euston, which did not make up direct bags for the South-Western line, had for that line they put with others in their bags for the up North-Western travelling post-office. The North-Western travelling office, in turn, before reaching Euston, sorted all the letters received for the South-Western line, enclosing some in direct bags for the large towns, and the rest in a bag for the South-Western travelling post-office. The latter finally made the residue up with others received in course of its travels.

By these means the delivery of letters was accelerated to the extent of two or three hours at a period of the day when, for commercial purposes, every moment is of importance.

The organization of a provincial head post-office follows more or less the lines of the London office. It presents, however, a special feature—that which is known as cross-posts. Such posts cannot be generalized, but examples may be given. Those of a great city, such as Manchester, are numerous and complicated; those of a smaller town, such as Bournemouth, will be better understood.

But while mentioning a city of the North, let me take a single illustration of the circulation by Northern cross-post from sub-office to sub-office, from Kirby

Moorside in East Yorkshire to Grasmere in West Westmorland.

A letter posted at Kirby before 6.25 p.m. would be sent in its bag for York. At York it would be sorted into a bag for the station post-office at Carnforth, which is on the Carlisle line a little north of Lancaster.

This bag would travel from York by up night mail to Normanton; thence by a cross-post established some years ago on my proposal, between Normanton and Carnforth, *viâ* Leeds (a cross-post intended to connect more securely the up night mail from York with the down night mail from London to Glasgow and the North). The station post-office at Carnforth would send the letter in a direct bag to Grasmere, where the delivery begins at 7.10 a.m., so that a letter written in the evening at a village on the one side of the country is delivered in a village on the other side possibly before most receivers of letters are awake.

At Bournemouth mails are made up at night for 31 towns. They include many cross-post bags, such being despatched to Bath, Bristol, Birmingham, and even so distant a city as Liverpool. The town of Bournemouth enjoys by the Midland route excellent railway communication with the western side of England, and as the Post-Office by the terms of its contract can make use of all Midland trains, the public benefit by the expeditious transit of letters which is thereby secured. So much for the west; to the east, cross-post bags are sent off to

Southampton, Portsmouth, and Brighton ; and it would not be incorrect to write that in other directions the bags which Bournemouth forwards to Blandford, Dorchester, Kingston-on-Thames, Salisbury, Sherborne, Weymouth, and Yeovil come into the cross-post category.

Nine separate bags and certain separate bundles are made up for London and its districts, while as for Christchurch, Lymington, Parkstone, Poole, Wareham and Wimborne, perhaps the bags for those places, though strictly the outcome of cross-posts, may be considered as local. Up to the year before my entry into the service, little Bournemouth, which is now almost a city, depended on the Poole Post-Office and a donkey and cart for its letters.

Finally, at various periods of the day bags are sent off for certain travelling post-offices and sorting tenders, so completing its cross-post communication with all parts.

Such is the programme of the night mail as prepared at the head post-office at Bournemouth ; and such, more or less, is the work nightly set before all head post-offices.

There is in operation a remarkable line of mail-carts across Kent and Sussex from Rochester to Brighton, a distance of $64\frac{1}{2}$ miles. The object is to connect directly all parts of the two counties, and to deliver into the extensive rural districts of East and West Kent and East Sussex the correspondence brought by the South-Eastern mail-trains to Staple-

hurst. A cart starts from Rochester at 8 p.m. and is due in Brighton at 6.15 a.m., waits for trains and stops for sorting purposes eating into time. In the opposite direction the start from Brighton takes place at 7.15 p.m., and the arrival at Rochester is at 5.15 a.m. The route lies through Chatham, Maidstone and Staplehurst, where the main exchange of mails takes place; through Hawkhurst, which is the postal centre of an extensive area, and Cross-in-Hand, to which a cart from Eastbourne brings bags; through Blackboys, to which Uckfield sends a cart, and Lewes. By these means letters posted in London, or arriving there from other parts in the evening, are distributed all over East and West Kent by seven or eight o'clock next morning, while the cross-post letters and parcels which originate in Kent or Sussex circulate with great celerity.

Once, in an emergency, Sir Rowland Hill hit on the expedient of directing that certain classes of correspondence for the Metropolis from towns north of London should be forwarded by *down* mail-train, to be sorted in the course of the journey, and brought eventually to London by *up* mail-train. This plan is now followed, in principle, in a variety of cases, to the advantage of the service and the acceleration of the correspondence dealt with. For example, letters received into the South-Eastern night mail travelling post-office for Bromley, Bickley Station, Brighton, Croydon, Faversham, or Chislehurst, are carried down to Dover and despatched to those towns on the

up journey. Any letters received into the London and Exeter travelling office for certain places near Staines go down to Bath and come back again; those received in the South-Western travelling post-office for Bracknell, Brentford, Chertsey, Cobham, Esher, or Guildford, go down to Southampton and back; while letters received in the London and North-Western travelling post-office for Amersham or Chesham go even as far as Crewe, whence they are despatched to their destination by the up mail-train.

Fourteen bags are made up in London for conveyance by the midnight mail-train (which is not provided with an apparatus-carriage), for Aylesbury, Berkhamstead, Towcester, Weedon, etc. These bags are taken down to Rugby, in order that they may be transferred there to the up night mail-train, and dropped at the proper point by the apparatus which is attached to that train. Similarly, correspondence for certain Buckinghamshire towns, other than Aylesbury, despatched by down night mail from London, is sent in a bag to Rugby, and there transferred to the up mail travelling post-office.

I may very well contrast my experience in the circulation of London letters in 1888, when the activity of Mr. R. C. Tombs, as Controller of the London Postal Service, caused numberless improvements to be effected, with that of Mr. George Louis, my predecessor, in 1838.

We both resided, in our time, 2 or 3 miles from Oxford Street—he at Hammersmith, I at Hampstead.

If he had a letter for London, and did not post it before 4 p.m., it was not delivered until noon next day. If I posted a letter as late as 3 in the morning, it was delivered in any part of London at 8. I could receive a letter from Kilburn at 6 p.m., reply to it at 7 p.m., and get an answer, written the same night, at 8 the next morning.

When penny postage was established in 1840, a census was taken of post-offices, head and subordinate, in the United Kingdom. They numbered 4,028. In the year 1893 the total had risen to 19,625, and if thereto be added 25,072 letter-boxes, so making a gross total of 44,797 receptacles available for public use, the places for posting letters will be found to be now eleven times more numerous than they were half a century ago.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MINISTER.

HER MAJESTY'S POSTMASTER-GENERAL, especially if he be a member of the Cabinet, is one of the hardest-worked politicians of the day. He has no peace. Almost daily he is at the Post-Office, and during the Session half the night at Westminster. Moreover, he is six days out of the seven pursued by the fateful 'pouch.'

In this are enclosed twenty or thirty sets of papers known as 'cases,' and on each he must pronounce a judgment. He might, it is true, take for granted the secretarial advice endorsed on each case, restrict himself to a formal approval, and so dispose of his paper-work in a short space of time. But if he choose to review the recommendations submitted to him, examine the evidence on which they are based, and acquaint himself with the organization on which the cases turn, some hours may be spent on a single pouch.

Moreover, the pouch, though important, is only one part of his Ministerial work. Much personal attention

is nowadays given by Postmasters-General to the appeals of deputations, and to questions which involve oral discussion; and these, with little to show for them, eat into the day.

He has no holiday, the pouch pursuing him wherever he may flee for change or rest. Sometimes the issues presented by the cases are momentous. Public interests may be largely at stake. A hasty settlement might injuriously affect his following of 130,000 souls, and a revenue of which the millions cannot be counted on the fingers of both hands. It might discount the popularity of the Government of the day.

There have been, even in my time, Postmasters-General who limited their action to questions of policy and principle, and who delegated the actual management wholly to the permanent officers. The Earl of Elgin adopted this course. In later years the tendency has been for the Minister to intervene, certainly in all questions of importance, and to some extent in matters of detail as well.

Perhaps a middle course, one that leaves with the permanent staff adequate freedom of action, coupled with full responsibility, and yet admits of the mind of the political chief being impressed on general policy and management, is that which works best for the country at large.

Mr. Fawcett was as popular outside the walls of the Post-Office as within them; and when he held the Ministerial post, the accepted idea of the public was that he did everything with his own hands. For

instance, a vestryman sitting next to me at Hampstead once remarked : ' My four o'clock letters sometimes do not come till five. I mean to write to Mr. Fawcett about it.'

Now, although Mr. Fawcett, blind as he was, toiled at the oar lest he should do unjustly or unwisely, and was unsparing of himself, yet to have dealt with a tenth of the best work of the Post-Office would have broken him down in a month. The public like to be in touch with the Minister, and it is well that it should be so ; but unless a rigorous sifting of official correspondence and a liberal delegation of authority prevailed, any one chief officer would quickly fall under an insupportable burden. That must be obvious to all. Mr. Frederic Hill tells the story of a Postmaster-General who ordered that letters addressed to him as such should be laid on his table. This was done, but the new plan ordered one day was countermanded the next. A single day's experience of the labour of opening and reading the letters sufficed.

It goes without saying that the Postmaster-General is the fount of all authority in the Post-Office. But his is a limited monarchy, after all.

If the Lords of the Treasury sanction his financial proposals, such then acquire the force of law ; but if they refuse (a contingency which has been known to arise), they fall to the ground.

The Secretary of the Post-Office, chief permanent functionary though he be, has no inherent power, except such as he derives from his chief. He shines

by reflected light, every act of his in the Post-Office being done in the name of the Postmaster-General. In practice he has, of course, very large authority. The postal machine otherwise could not work properly. As the adviser of his political chief, every paper submitted to the latter must first receive the impress of his own views; and by tradition he has necessarily, with great responsibility, great freedom of action. But in theory he is only the mouthpiece of the Postmaster-General.

The relative status of those two great officers—the Minister and the Secretary—was well defined in a discussion which arose out of a difference of opinion shortly before the retirement of Sir Rowland Hill from the Post-Office. The question to be settled was, who should be the chairman of a certain departmental committee. The choice lay between Mr. F. I. Scudamore and Mr. W. J. Godby; Sir Rowland, by formal minute, ‘advised’ the appointment of the one; Lord Stanley of Alderley, who was Postmaster-General, decided on appointing the other.

To this Sir Rowland demurred, and appeared to hold the view that in such a matter the Secretarial recommendation should be paramount; that he had been appointed by the Treasury, and so, it might be inferred, was not in all things directly amenable to the orders of the politician at the Post-Office. At least, this was the gist of his contention. But Lord Stanley retorted that the terms of his patent gave him, and him alone, authority in the Post-Office. He in-

sisted that his nomination should prevail, which accordingly it did.

To me it has always appeared that, as a pure abstract question of right, Lord Stanley's view was sound and constitutional. Under any other view, the Post-Office would attempt that which authority declares no man can do, viz., to serve two masters. Of course, the expediency of over-ruling the proposals of the highest permanent officer in the Post-Office, and so running the risk of weakening the springs of authority throughout the department, is quite another issue.

Supremacy does not go very far when the purse-strings are in the hands of another. Expenditure, wisely effected, is clearly the life-blood of the Post-Office; for as population, commerce, and wealth grow, the Post-Office must enlarge its borders, advance in the tide of progress, or for ever lag behind.

Yet not a penny can be spent on the establishment without Treasury sanction, and while some ardent progressionists may lament that the Postmaster-General has not a longer tether, and while minor evils may flow from checks so engendered to departmental activity, it is clear that one authority alone should control the purse-strings of the nation, and have the final voice in questions of outlay—and that that voice must be the Treasury's.

A Secretary of the Treasury in modern times is reported to have said that he was really the Postmaster-General. This, if actually stated, was true enough in a sense. He was both 'my Lords' and the

Postmaster on a question of scales of pay, or of additional clerical force, or variation of pension, and on most other questions of financial importance.

It must be remembered, too, that on its political side the Treasury is largely the Government itself, inasmuch as the Premier usually, though not always, is the First Lord, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer almost invariably stands next in authority in the Government. If the lay or permanent side can speak and act in the name and with the authority of these powerful Ministers, then even the mere junior, who in a Civil Service competition may just have won his place at the Treasury by a mark or two over his brother at the Inland Revenue, or Customs, or Post-Office, becomes a veritable power in the land.

A Postmaster-General, however, who is in the Cabinet can always, it is believed, hold his own against any odds when he has the public at his back. Mr. Fawcett was not even in the Cabinet, but by mere force of will and public sympathy he carried his points.

The Marquis of Hartington was said at Whitehall to be too big a man for the Post-Office. His lordship's talents, as events have shown, were no doubt equal to any position; but this was not what the Whitehall saying was intended to convey. Plainer words would have been—His postal proposals cannot be over-ruled.

Sixteen Postmasters-General have held office in my time:

Viscount Canning came into office on January 8,

1853. His lordship was greatly interested in Post-Office work. He sanctioned the book-post, made a postal treaty with France, and reorganized the department at home. 'I have said,' wrote he on January 31, 1855, 'that the Post-Office is essentially a department of progress, and one which admits of constant improvement and expansion.' Lord Canning acted up to these opinions, and rendered good service to the State while Postmaster-General. He was afterwards, as is well known, Governor-General of India, and its first Viceroy, and held office during the mutiny. Sir Rowland Hill has borne testimony to his great talents, high principles, strict conscientiousness, and unwearied industry, as displayed at the Post-Office, where he continued to transact business until the very day of his departure for the East.

To paraphrase the boast of Heine, it may be truly said that if anyone names the best half-dozen Postmasters-General, Viscount Canning's name must be brought in amongst them. But that is saying little. Amongst the most eminent administrators of the Victorian age, the name of Earl Canning, or, more glorious still, the cognomen of 'Clemency' Canning, must surely shine conspicuous.

The Duke of Argyll, K.G., afterwards Secretary of State for India, came to the Post-Office on November 30, 1855, but remained there a very short time. His quickness of apprehension greatly impressed Sir Rowland; his facility of composition struck him with amazement. The Duke's adminis-

tration has always been spoken of in terms of approval and respect. He allowed me to send my scheme of 1856 for a postal telegraph system to the Treasury.

Lord Colchester, appointed on March 13, 1856, devoted himself with unremitting care to a mastery of the working of the department in all its details.

The Earl of Elgin became Postmaster-General on June 29, 1859, and remained in office about a year. He was then appointed Viceroy of India. It was he who, at the outbreak of the Indian Mutiny, diverted at the Straits of Sunda the British forces intended to support his lordship's mission to China, and took or sent them to Lord Canning's help at Calcutta. He was a man of admirable qualities.

Lord Stanley of Alderley succeeded Lord Elgin on August 28, 1860. His name is chiefly identified with the establishment of the Post-Office Savings Bank, the broad-sheet of regulations for establishing which went out under his signature. His lordship was in favour of my postal telegraph scheme, as will be seen hereafter.

The patent of the *Duke of Montrose* is dated July 19, 1866. The Telegraph Bill of 1868 was passed during his Grace's term of office. He was at great pains to acquaint himself with Post-Office business.

The Marquis of Hartington, M.P., now Duke of Devonshire, K.G., took up office on December 30, 1868. The transfer of the telegraphs occurred while his lordship was Postmaster-General. He signed a cheque for nearly £3,000,000 in paying off one of

the principal telegraph companies — the biggest cheque, his lordship is reported to have said, he was ever likely to sign.

The Right Hon. William Monsell, M.P. (afterwards Lord Emly), was appointed on January 24, 1871. After the lapse of a score of years he had not forgotten his old officials, and we had the pleasure of seeing his lordship, on the occasion of the Postal Jubilee, at South Kensington in 1890. He died this year.

The Right Hon. Lyon Playfair, M.P. (now Lord Playfair), came to the Post-Office on November 28, 1873; was chairman of a Committee of the House of Commons on the telegraphs, before which I went as witness, and he sanctioned the issue of postcards and postal orders.

Lord John Manners, M.P., began his first term of office on May 4, 1874. When his second term came he was Duke of Rutland.

The Right Hon. Henry Fawcett, M.P., the blind Postmaster-General, was appointed on May 14, 1880. I refer more especially to his period of office further on.

The Right Hon. G. J. Shaw-Lefevre, M.P., was appointed Postmaster-General November 7, 1884. He filled, as the *locum tenens* of his friend, during Mr. Fawcett's first severe illness, the unique office of Deputy Postmaster-General, the only appointment under that term ever held in the United Kingdom. His tenure of office in either capacity was short, but no epoch was more active than that of his

administration, as he threw himself with energy, and even enthusiasm, into whatever fell in his way. It was as inspiring to work with him as with his lamented predecessor. The parcel post he adopted as warmly as though it were his own production, and he was firm in his intention still further to extend both its scope and prosperity.

He raised the limit of weight for inland parcels to 11 pounds and adopted a graduated charge for each intermediate pound. He had further views, which, if they had been assented to by all concerned, would have fixed the charge for an 11-pound parcel at 1s. 2d. instead of 1s. 6d., the present price. But the project fell through.

He built, or planned to build, several new post-offices, and carried on all branches of the service with great vigour, until, on the resignation of Mr. Gladstone's Government in the summer of 1885, his administration came to a close. Almost his last official act, as Postmaster-General, was to give notice of ten or a dozen changes of importance for July 1 of that year.

Acceleration of the night mails for Scotland was the main feature of the new programme. New night mails for Lancashire and North Wales and supplementary mails for Edinburgh and Glasgow were also established. Additional facilities for posting letters for South Wales were granted, and, with a touch of romance, a new midnight mail to the North was announced.

If busy at midnight, we were to be up with the lark in order to despatch new early mails for Yorkshire, and although it is chronologically inexact to group an improvement which took place in May with the July changes, yet it may be added that while rising betimes to accelerate the morning Continental letters for the Midlands, Mr. Shaw-Lefevre further showed his solicitude for trading interests by establishing a new mid-day mail from London to the principal towns in Yorkshire, and to towns generally on the Great Northern lines of railway, the correspondence forwarded by which is available for distribution the same day.

Yorkshire duly cared for, the Metropolis next benefited by his comprehensive scheme. A later posting of letters for the last delivery in London was arranged for, and at the same time a later posting for the provincial night mails generally.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer of the day told me in effect that, while he approved of the proposed arrangements for later posting as a Minister, yet the benefit to him as a private citizen was not unmixed, inasmuch as, instead of putting down his pen at five o'clock and having a little rest and leisure before dinner, he would now have to toil at private correspondence for at least another hour.

Not so thought the Chancellor's illustrious predecessor, Mr. Benjamin Disraeli, forty-five years earlier. He considered the post went out too soon. 'This new penny post,' said he, in writing to his sister, January

15, 1840, 'is hateful, as one must write so early. It closes at five o'clock.'

A really great measure of Mr. Shaw-Lefevre's, simple as it may appear on paper, was a reduction of the rates of postage for heavy letters. The scale of postage applicable to letters over 12 ounces in weight advanced at a bound from light rates to oppressive ones. For instance, while the postage of a letter of 12 ounces in weight was 4d., a letter of 13 ounces cost 1s. 1d. The new scale adopted was—for the first ounce, 1d.; for 2 ounces, 1½d., as before; and for all greater weights, ½d. for every 2 ounces, counting from the first ounce, plus a penny. This change brought down the charge for a 14-ounce letter from 1s. 2d. to 4½d., and had an immediate and very marked effect in increasing the number of heavy letters posted, and the amount of postage collected upon them.

A system of insurance of parcels and registered postal packets was foreshadowed in the public notice, as was also the establishment of colonial and foreign parcel posts.

Three other useful measures were notified, viz., a regular despatch of the mails for the West Indies every two weeks, instead of on the 2nd and 17th of each month; the inclusion of the kingdom of Siam in the Postal Union, and the extension of money orders to Hawaii.

Trade was fairly good, the postal exchequer was overflowing, the public and Parliament were well

affected, and the statesmanship of Fawcett and Lefevre had revived the spirit of progress which animated the Post-Office in the days of Rowland Hill.

Things went merrily. The press were unanimous in their approval. The *Globe* of June 22, 1885, wrote that:

‘Mr. Shaw-Lefevre publishes a programme of postal reforms which, if they can all be successfully realized, will certainly entitle him to a distinguished place in the annals of St. Martin’s-le-Grand. . . . But the thanks of the public are due to Mr. Shaw-Lefevre chiefly for the abolition of the extraordinary anomaly by which London was far worse off than almost any provincial town in reference to the despatch of the night mails.’

The *Times* of the same date observed that:

‘The notice which we publish in another column, summarizing the several postal improvements which are to take effect on the 1st of next month, affords sufficient proof that Mr. Fawcett’s successor has not been idle during the seven months of his rule at St. Martin’s-le-Grand.’

The *Daily Telegraph* also adduced generous testimony in the following terms in its issue of July 1:

‘Before quitting his brief administration of the Post-Office, Mr. Shaw-Lefevre gave his sanction to one of the most extensive schemes of letter postal reform introduced for many years. It affects almost all parts of the United Kingdom, but London naturally shares to a greater degree than any other city in the

acceleration, which takes effect from to-day. Not only are the great trunk services radiating in all directions increased in number, but in many cases their speed is very considerably augmented; while within the Metropolitan district itself one very noteworthy improvement cannot fail to be appreciated by all classes.'

On retiring from official life, Mr. Shaw-Lefevre, from his place in the House of Commons, propounded a plan for applying systematically a portion of the Post-Office surplus to improvements. He favours the idea that a sum should be fixed upon as a normal surplus, and that the Postmaster-General should be at liberty to apply all profits, in excess of that sum, as he sees fit in increasing the efficiency and convenience of postal services.

When critics review the administration of the Post-Office, and reprove it for this or that shortcoming, it is seldom sufficiently borne in mind that, in shaping its course towards extension and improvement, the department is not wholly a free agent. Criticisms of postal policy, though ostensibly aimed at the Post-Office, hit, as a rule, the policy of the Government of the day, to which the department has to conform, and not necessarily that which it can itself control, or would desire to adopt. Money is usually the stumbling-block in the way of advancement, and so long as the net postal collections are relied on at the Exchequer as an important part of the national revenue, so long must there be a tendency, whether

at the West End or the East, to resist new expenditure, especially such as is not in its nature urgent and indispensable.

To me, and probably to most people, it would appear that the Post-Office, with which the social and commercial interests of the nation are so closely knit, must either progress in efficiency and usefulness or fall back. It can hardly stand still. If the boat rest on its oars, down-stream it will drift.

The view conveyed by the leading journal of January 10, 1890, seems the true one :

‘The Post-Office, also, since penny postage was inducted into its primacy, has toiled so assiduously as to merit a fair part of the glories of the occasion. But its officers are bound not to forget that the wonderful position their department has won is due less to the accurate performance of routine duties than to originality and inventiveness.

‘Sir Rowland Hill would never have accomplished his splendid undertaking if he had allowed himself to be baffled by external official hindrances. He fought those throughout his career; and the best tradition he has bequeathed to the office of which he made a beacon for the world is the memory of the right he extorted for it to apply its resources for the discharge of its proper work.’

No honest servant of the State would contend that the Post-Office might properly be made wholly independent of financial control. That, under constitutional government, would clearly be not only

inexpedient but impossible ; but it may be that the relations of the department towards the collective Government of the day can be so readjusted—whether under Mr. Shaw-Lefevre's plan or another—as to give full play to whatever administrative genius the Post-Office may have the good luck to command, and ensure that this 'beacon of the world' shall continuously shed a bright and steady light.

When Mr. Shaw-Lefevre left us, an honoured face which already for six years had pleasantly overlooked the officials of St. Martin's-le-Grand was again seen at headquarters. *The Duke of Rutland* (formerly Lord John Manners) became Postmaster-General for the second time on June 29, 1885. His Grace was uniformly kind in his dealings, and was held in universal esteem. He thoroughly understood the business of the Post-Office.

George Grenfell, Lord Wolverton, entered office on February 12, 1886. The department has reason to remember his goodness and private liberality. Nor did benefactions cease with his death, as his widow, the late Lady Georgiana, was ever the friend of the Post-Office. When her ladyship died, in January, 1894, a deputation from the Eastern Central Institution for Telegraph Boys paid the tribute of sorrow at her grave's side. Sir Arthur Blackwood once found that a sum of £500 was required to establish this institution on a durable basis. Most of the accustomed sources of private beneficence were drained dry. Where could he turn for aid? A thought

struck him. He took train for Wimbledon, and in a few words told his story. 'I think I can help you,' said her ladyship, and placed in his hands a cheque for the full amount.

The Right Hon. Henry Cecil Raikes was appointed Postmaster-General by letters patent dated August 5, 1886. His administration extended over five years; that is, until his death in August, 1891, at the age of fifty-three. I have many pleasant memories of this experienced politician, who never spared himself at the post of duty, who shrank from no responsibility, and ever, amidst public cares and anxieties and uncertain health, was ready to identify himself with the official functions and unofficial pastimes of his department.

Before he became Postmaster-General, Mr. Raikes had acquired considerable distinction as chairman of Committees of the House of Commons, and perhaps it was during his term of office that the rule of the House was for the first time largely enforced of naming, *i.e.*, reporting to the Speaker the name of any member who was held to disregard the authority of the chair. It will be remembered that on one historical occasion, after an all-night sitting, fourteen or fifteen members were so named.

The severe strain which the watchful exercise of the functions of chairman in those troublous times involved, unquestionably undermined his strength and told upon his constitution. In fact, he said as much to me in the year before his death.

No doubt can exist as to the vigorous grasp of Mr. Raikes of all questions which came before him to determine. He had the power of taking in at a glance the main features of every case submitted to his decision. If the judgment of the staff and his own were not always in close agreement, it must be remembered that he alone was responsible to Parliament, and that the political view and the departmental view do not necessarily concur.

The idea of personal responsibility was very strong in Mr. Raikes, and it may have been a point of conscience with him to impress on all the postal questions which he had to decide the stamp of an original and independent mind. Perhaps some untoward circumstance, in itself insignificant, may in the earlier years of his Postmaster-Generalship have given rise to the impression that the department had a will of its own apart from the will of its chief; and this impression may have coloured some of the official decisions. Of course it was not really so; the officers of the Post-Office are too devoted to the service, too loyal, too keenly sensible of the exact line of duty, to run counter avowedly to the wishes or policy of the Minister. Long experience may now and then show that in given circumstances a certain course is the best; and the permanent officers would be merely within the lines of duty in advocating such course until the Minister, by virtue of his patent rights and legal responsibility, saw fit to set precedent aside.

While Mr. Raikes certainly disliked to receive any

advice which had the appearance of being thrust upon him, he was never, to my knowledge, unwilling to give due weight to opinions which he himself requested, or which came out in the natural course of discussion.

My impression is that Mr. Raikes warmly appreciated, and was quite ready to acknowledge, any mark of good feeling which his officers sought to pay to him. He wrote to me the following graceful letter relative to the opening event of the Jubilee celebrations of 1890:

'The Lodge,
'Corpus Christi College,
'Cambridge,
'Jan., 1890.

'DEAR MR. BAINES,

'I should have written sooner to ask you to accept for yourself, and to convey to the committee, my grateful acknowledgments of the admirable manner in which our Jubilee banquet was organized and carried through. It was, I think, in every way worthy of the memorable occasion which it served to celebrate, and I feel sure that you and the other gentlemen who were associated with you in making your arrangements will long look back with pride and pleasure upon its unqualified success. "*Hæc olim meminisse juvabit.*"

'Yours very truly,

'HENRY CECIL RAIKES.'

Six months later I received another letter from my

chief, the second paragraph of which must surely set at rest any question of his true attitude towards, and his regard for, those who faithfully served him in his high office :

‘ July 15, 1890.

‘ DEAR MR. BAINES,

‘ I must thank you not only for the kind invitation of your committee, but also for the very cordial and gratifying manner in which you have conveyed it.

‘ As long as I live I can never forget the ready, unsparing aid and goodwill which I have experienced from all the chief officers of the G.P.O. with whom I have had any official relations ; and it is mainly due to this cordial and loyal co-operation that we have just surmounted so serious a crisis.

‘ My doctor has ordered me to go to Royat on the earliest day that I can arrange ; and at present I expect to get away on the 26th, so I fear I ought not to make any engagement for the 28th. If, however, the 23rd should be a convenient date for the committee, I should be delighted to be their guest on that evening. If it is not, you must not scruple to say so.

‘ Believe me, with many thanks,

‘ Very truly yours,

‘ H. C. RAIKES.’

He was with us and the busy world little more than another year.

Mr. Raikes may have looked forward to a higher post in the Government than that of Postmaster-General, and it was rumoured that the appointment, when made, was not wholly to his taste. However that may have been, there was, after he had taken up office, no more diligent chief to be found amongst Ministers than the new Postmaster-General. He introduced the sample post, and laboured sedulously, as his predecessors had done, to improve the prospects and pay of the bulk of the staff. At his death the postmen were amongst the first to lay a tribute of sorrow on his grave. Her Majesty's Private Secretary, having occasion to write to me, added these words: 'The Queen . . . is much grieved for the loss of your chief, for whom she had a sincere respect;' so that sympathy prevailed from the ranks of the lowly-placed to the highest in the land. His bearing towards me was ever friendly. He gave me his portrait. The Office subscribed towards a memorial window in the church at Mold.

On the decease of Mr. Raikes, the Right Honourable *Sir James Fergusson, Bart., M.P.*, was appointed Postmaster-General. He was one of the pleasantest, most capable, and certainly most prompt Ministers within my experience. At the Post-Office he was indefatigable, never delaying papers, and often remaining at his desk when Parliament was not sitting until long after the usual official hours. He was fair-minded, did not shrink from responsibility, and had a firm grip of postal business.

Although only a year at the Post-Office, Sir James certainly made his mark, contriving by untiring application to master many difficult postal problems. But for the constitutional restraint which the Treasury, having the whole national balance-sheet within its purview, is at times bound to exercise over the revenue departments, it is my opinion that he, like some of his predecessors, would have accomplished more than technically can be placed to his credit. Lord Salisbury's Ministry went out of office on August 17, 1892, and then in a farewell letter Sir James Fergusson said that he could not quit the department without expressing to its officers and members the personal regret which he felt in the close of his connection with them, as well as the pleasure and interest which he had experienced during its brief continuance.

He, like his predecessor, recalled with the utmost satisfaction the continual and unvarying co-operation and sympathy which had existed between himself and all the responsible officers with whom he had been principally brought into contact; and he went on to say: 'But I can truly add that I have felt constantly that I was presiding over a service abounding in public servants who are pervaded with a sense of responsibility, possessed of high administrative ability, and actuated by fidelity and honourable ambition in the performance of their duty.' So true friendliness marked the parting of master and servants.

The patent of the *Right Hon. Arnold Morley, M.P.*,

members of the House of Lords, and five of the six were appointed in the earlier years of my service. Thus it would appear that in effect the representation of the Post-Office has been remitted to the House of Commons. There the Post-Office is in good odour. Rarely is resistance of importance offered to any of the postal votes. Large additions to staff and salaries have been passed without a murmur. The explanation is, no doubt, to be found in two facts: (1) that never has better value been given for a penny than is represented by the collection of a letter at John o' Groats and its free delivery at the Land's End; and (2) that over and above the splendid services which the department renders to the nation at large, it pays in a snug sum approaching £3,000,000 of clear profit to the Exchequer.

Which are the Postmasters-General whose services to the State have been of most account in the last forty years may be left to be determined by future historians of the Post-Office; but on one point there will be common agreement, and that is that the most picturesque figure at St. Martin's-le-Grand since the 'pretended' Act of 1657 is that of the Minister who was in office from 1880 to 1884.

An effective sketch of that remarkable man, the Right Honourable Henry Fawcett, M.P., Professor of Political Economy at the University of Cambridge, will be found in Mr. Leslie Stephen's memoir of his departed friend. I shall only attempt here to reproduce the portrait of the blind Postmaster-General as

he presented himself in the daily intercourse of official life.

My recollection pictures Mr. Fawcett's athletic form in a room on the ground-floor of the administrative buildings of the Post-Office, on the western side of St. Martin's-le-Grand. He was usually seated at a table midway between the fireplace and the fourth window from Newgate Street, opposite to the London District Sorting Office of the old building. It was his habit to be so seated as to command the door by which his visitors entered. For although he could not see them, yet all who came were received with outstretched hand or cheerful word, as though he actually beheld them.

All letters to the Treasury, contracts, conventions, and important papers requiring the Postmaster-General's signature were signed by Mr. Fawcett himself in full, in a bold, clear hand. The general instructions he gave were embodied by the Secretary in drafts, which were read over to him and amended as he saw fit, and then were fairly copied and read over to him again prior to signature. In frequent instances he would himself dictate to an amanuensis communications of moment; and he took especial pains to draft answers to questions to be put to him in the House of Commons in frank and intelligible terms, which, of course, he had to learn by heart.

In Mr. Fawcett's time I saw more than in previous years of statesmen in office, and had with him many

highly interesting visits to Whitehall. One such visit is fraught with mournful associations. The late Lord Frederick Cavendish was then the Secretary of the Treasury. Mr. Fawcett took me to a consultation, at which was discussed a new classification of the pay and grades of sorting clerks and telegraphists. They formed a body of many thousands, and the improvement of pay conceded eventually cost £150,000 or £200,000 a year. It was a large question to decide. Nearly a year had been spent at the Post-Office in working out various schemes and selecting the best. Ultimately Mr. Fawcett, in full conclave, settled that he would accept the advice he had allowed me to tender on the subject, and he therefore desired me to accompany him to the Treasury.

Memory recalls the figure of Lord Frederick bending over his desk in quiet attention to the flow of argument, and being called away to his duties in the House of Commons before the talk was ended. He was but too soon called away in another and final sense. A few weeks after that interview he was appointed Irish Secretary, and on taking up his new duties in Dublin was, as all my readers will remember, murdered with Mr. Burke on a sunny afternoon in the Phoenix Park.

Mr. Fawcett had required me to be present at many official discussions, and he was no longer a stranger to me ; still, it was an agreeable surprise to receive from him on December 9, 1881, a letter notifying my appointment as Assistant-Secretary. From that

time forward he sent for me almost daily, the conversation turning in the main on questions of railway administration, but also on the lines of the contemplated parcel post, so that my opportunities of estimating his character and ability were frequent.

One charm of Mr. Fawcett's administrative methods was his eagerness to recognise good work wherever he found it. Conscious of a full grasp of the department he administered, he was well content that others should have their share in official argument with persons in authority. He had no jealousy of semi-official interviews at the Treasury, provided that he was kept aware of what was going on.

In the parcel post, which he established in 1883, Mr. Fawcett took great personal interest. It was, perhaps, his main, at any rate his most conspicuous, work. But he was just as willing for the solicitor of the Post-Office and me to have dealings with the Secretary of the Treasury on the subject, as to go to Whitehall himself. He was ever pleasant and confidential in his official relations. Once his life was threatened during a period of political strife, but the menace did not trouble his courageous spirit.

Engrossing as were the Professor's official functions at the Post-Office, he had time for other matters: for his duties in Parliament, for lectures at Cambridge, and for innumerable engagements, social and political. One of his great objects, the preservation of open spaces for those who could see and enjoy them, always commanded his energetic and beneficent atten-

tion. This feature of Mr. Fawcett's public life is ably treated in Mr. Leslie Stephen's work, in a chapter which appears to have been mainly composed by Mr. (now Sir) Robert Hunter, who had very ample means of writing on the subject with force and authority.

Any special bit of news of the work of his department was always interesting to its chief. Witness this telegram at Christmas-time in 1883 :

' Henry Fawcett, Cambridge, to F. E. Baines, London.

' 9 p.m.—I have just received with the greatest pleasure your telegram telling me of the successful way in which the pressure with regard to parcels and general post work is being got through. I shall be glad if you will convey to the staff my appreciation of the zeal with which they are working.'

A few days later the telegram was followed up by a full letter acknowledging the good work of the staff.

A principal source of Mr. Fawcett's great popularity and influence in the department lay in his thought and consideration for others, whether he was at work in London or snatching a brief holiday in the country. An unfailing grasp of the duties of his office did not debar him from keeping in mind the welfare of his officers, nor from allowing them to be interested in matters personal to himself. He made his coadjutors feel that blood is thicker than water drawn from the official well, and that their private anxieties concerned him as much as his own.

Mr. Fawcett returned to the Post-Office in the spring of 1883, after an absence of some months, with his health apparently re-established as firmly as ever, but his resumption of duty was of short duration.

The following extract from one of the published letters of the Baroness Bunsen had an exact application in the case of Mr. Fawcett :

‘ I enjoyed the other day going over the well-known fine collection of pictures at Blaise Castle, which poor Mr. Harford, in total blindness, *showed* me himself with perfect *savoir faire*, knowing by heart all the points to be remarked, and directing towards what corner a chair should be placed from whence I could have the best light upon each. I had been afraid that I should have been bound to look by stealth, to avoid reminding him of his calamity, but found that images before the mind’s eye constitute his chief pleasure in his life of bodily darkness.’

The blind Professor could both enjoy and describe good pictures ; he fished in trout and salmon streams, and took pleasure in the description of fine scenery. He resided when in London at The Lawn, Lambeth, in a house since swept away in the improvements which have made The Lawn an open space. That the spot where he dwelt should be dedicated to the enjoyment of the public for ever would be in true harmony with his aim in life, but that his actual abode should have been destroyed is a matter of regret.

As far as was possible this misadventure has been

remedied by the public liberality of Sir Henry Doulton. That gentleman has provided, at his own expense, a colossal group of statuary in Vauxhall Park—as The Lawn has been renamed—representing Mr. Fawcett seated, attended by Victory and other allegorical figures. The Archbishop of Canterbury unveiled the memorial on June 7, 1893.

Mr. Fawcett was beloved at the Post-Office, being a just and capable man, and untiring in his efforts to do rightly in his relations with the service and the public. He was kindly and courteous, and all who were brought in contact with him felt instinctively that his heart was in his work and with his officers. He died on November 6, 1884, just fifty-one years of age.



THE RIGHT HON. HENRY FAWCETT,
HER MAJESTY'S POSTMASTER-GENERAL.
(Ob. 1884.)



CHAPTER IX.

THE EXECUTIVE.

IN these latter days—say, since Sir Rowland Hill gave proof of what the department, properly organized, could accomplish—the aim of the Post-Office has been to frame and carry out with ease, at least with success, such great measures as the public demand and Parliament or the Treasury sanction, and at the same time to hold in its hands the threads of the most minute official web which may spin itself even in the remotest corner of the British Isles.

It is one of the chief duties of the controlling power at headquarters to see that full efficiency is maintained, and that, through its executive, the department generally is kept abreast of the age. The measure of success which it attains in this respect rests on the broad basis of a perfected organization.

Apart from its resources in the Metropolis, the administration has an immense reserve of organizing and executive strength in its provincial officers, its

Postmasters and their Surveyors. The zeal and devotion which are to be found amongst them, as well as the untiring efforts to promote efficiency and the capacity of meeting emergent calls, have rarely been equalled in the public service—have certainly never been surpassed.

Many years of my official life have been spent in roving the country from end to end, and the insight so gained enables me to speak not without warrant, inasmuch as at one time my acquaintance with officials extended beyond those of the Metropolis to almost every provincial colleague of standing, and included some personal knowledge of the capacity of a very large number of the subordinate officers.

The army of 130,000 Post-Office servants, established and auxiliary, scattered over the face of the land must be as exact and well ordered as would be an army in the field in fine condition and perfect discipline. But, unlike the soldier, who moves as one of a mass, each man in the Post-Office has his distinct sphere of action. He must, however, act in harmony so complete with his distant comrades that an irregularity at John o' Groats shall not affect the due delivery of letters at Land's End. By what means is this accomplished ?

At the head of the executive stands the Secretary ; but he is, of course, a chief administrator, too. The 'Secretary' means one high functionary, and also some scores of auxiliaries and subordinates. Sir

Arthur Blackwood compared himself, not inaptly, to the managing director who is found next the chairman in private corporations. There are, it is true, a Financial Secretary and a Third Secretary, who, as well as the Secretary himself, advise the Postmaster-General on points within their allotted spheres. And there are also Assistant-Secretaries, one of whom combines with his office the functions of Inspector-General of Mails; another holds also the office of Controller of the Packet Service. But all act for or with the Secretary-in-chief, and alike are subject to his instructions and supervision.

Then come the heads of departments—a Solicitor, whose hands are full of weighty matters from early morn to dewy eve, and, in the case of the present incumbent at least, one who, be the cares of office what they may, has yet a free mind for other works of public utility and far-reaching benefit. Let the Open Spaces Preservation Society sound his praises, and Wimbledon Common, Epping Forest, and Parliament Hill Fields point the tale.

There is a Controller of the London Postal Service, who, as I have shown, carries on his shoulders more weight than most men would choose to bear. There is also a Receiver and Accountant-General, who can tell every morning what cash and postage-stamps were, or ought to have been, the day before yesterday in the hands of a postmaster of some little town in the wilds of Devon or of a colossal city of the North. He is as familiar with the nature of all items of

expenditure as with the origin of the millions which he pays into the Exchequer.

Let us turn aside for a moment to glance at finance. In the last year of the old rates of postage the expenditure of the Post-Office was £756,999. For the financial year 1893-94, Parliament provided for posts and telegraphs the not inconsiderable sum of £10,264,607.

In the year ended March, 1893, after deducting out of receipts payments due to other bodies, on whose behalf cash had been collected by the department, there remained on postal account a receipt of more than £10,250,000, and on telegraph account nearly £2,500,000, so that the total revenue was approximately £12,750,000. Hence, between 10½ millions voted and 12½ millions received, there is in round figures a profit on the Post-Office as a whole of £2,500,000. The last year of the old rates of postage yielded rather more than £1,500,000 of net revenue.

Roughly, the financial facts may be stated thus: The Post-Office, taken alone, yields a large profit; the telegraphs, if interest on loan debt be also reckoned with, exhibit a large deficiency. If the whole be lumped together, and if the Post-Office paid full interest, and provided a sinking fund out of revenue for the redemption of telegraph consols, there would still be left about £2,000,000 of net profit.

‘Valentines’ at one time yielded considerable postage: in 1855, £4,000; in 1867, £11,000 or

£12,000, but they have now almost disappeared from the post. They dated from 271—at least, such is the year of the reputed martyrdom of the saint—so that their reign was a long one.

One important principle underlies the whole system of account-keeping in the Post-Office. Many years ago Mr. Gladstone, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, laid down the golden rule that all revenue collections should be paid into the Exchequer without deduction, and that the money required for current services should be issued by the Paymaster-General out of the supplies voted by Parliament. This is straightforward account-keeping. The incomings are kept rigidly clear of the outgoings.

Once a certain rate-collector of my acquaintance got into a quandary with his accounts :

‘You collected £20 on the 1st, and only paid £15 into the bank. Why?’ asked the investigator.

‘Because I had £5 worth of bills to settle,’ the collector replied.

‘Again, on the 10th, as your vouchers show, you paid bills to the amount of £7; but you have only claimed £3. Why?’

‘I am not sure, but I think it was this way. I had collected £6 of the new rate, and £2 of the old one; so I took £4, out of that £8, and put the other £4 into the bank, as I had paid no money in for some time, and that left me £3 short, which I advanced out of my own pocket.’

Under the golden rule my poor collector would have paid into the bank all that he collected—the £20 and the £6 and the £2—and obtained from the parish treasurer separate cheques for the £5 and the

£7 to pay bills with. His accounts would then have been plain and aboveboard.

A principal feature of Post-Office management is that accounts all over the country are balanced and rendered daily. Every morning there is in the hand of the Receiver and Accountant-General a statement of the account of the Post-Office up to the night but one previous. The form is quite simple; even the inexpert could easily fill up its blanks. The accuracy of the balance admits of a ready test, and the surveying officer, on making a chance visit to a post-office, verifies the daily account as he finds it in the postmaster's books, and then sends a transcript of the previous day's entries to the Metropolitan office for comparison with the Accountant's record.

Once a certain postmaster was known to be in default. His Surveyor pounced down on him; all was right to a penny. So it happened a second and even a third time. Still, that there existed a money deficiency was morally certain. The town was ten miles from a railway-station. A thought struck the Surveyor. He made a fourth visit. Again all was correct.

'Order me a fly for the up-train, Mr. Postmaster, please.'

He drove off. Five miles on the road the fly was turned round and driven back.

'Produce your balance, Mr. Postmaster.'

There was the suspected deficiency. Getting early word of the Surveyor's arrival at the station, the

postmaster had each time borrowed the money, and, on the checking of the accounts being completed, had swiftly returned it.

Many able men have filled the office of Receiver and Accountant-General. Messrs. Hide, Scudamore, C.B., Chetwynd, C.B., and Richardson have done so in my time. Mr. J. J. Cardin now holds the appointment. Men of conspicuous ability have been drawn from time to time from the roll of the branch.

Properly speaking, the Receiver and Accountant-General's branch is the head and front of all account-keeping. But there are two other financial branches—the Savings Bank and the Money-order Office. The Controller of the former has £67,000,000 in his strong box, and knows his way about amongst 15,000,000 accounts, old and new, 113,000,000 deposits, and 39,000,000 withdrawals. Through the hands of successive Controllers, from the beginning in Lord Stanley of Alderley's time up to (say) December 31, 1890, have passed no less than £304,000,000; so vast is the outcome of an idea which floated through the brain of a Huddersfield banker.

The formation of a Post-Office Savings Bank, as broached by Charles W. Sikes, now more than thirty years ago, was one of those happy thoughts which, like the invention of lucifer matches and the 'fishing' of rails, had only to be propounded to secure instant recognition as supplying a want of the age. Yet this project had already simmered in

the brains of publicists for half a century. As far back as 1807 Mr. Whitbread, it is considered, clearly foreshadowed such an undertaking in a speech in the House of Commons.

No sooner, however, had Sir Charles (then Mr.) Sikes emitted his idea than the Member for Leeds, the Secretary of the Post-Office, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Parliament, and the country at once caught it up, and gave it substance and vitality.

The Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone, as Chancellor, threw himself with characteristic warmth and energy into the project. Touching on this subject, Mr. Scudamore told me, in instancing Mr. Gladstone's power of rapidly assimilating information, that being one day summoned to the Treasury for the purpose, he spent an hour, between two and three o'clock, in explaining verbally to the Chancellor the intricate details of the scheme as finally arranged at the Post-Office. At three o'clock Mr. Gladstone said that he must then break off the conference, as he had to think over what had been told him and be at the House by four.

An hour or two later he explained to the House of Commons, in Mr. Scudamore's hearing, the whole plan, principles and details included, in a luminous speech, from which not a single item of information essential to its complete exposition was omitted.

Lord Stanley of Alderley, as Postmaster-General, also took lively interest in the matter, and Messrs. Scudamore and Chetwynd, as already mentioned,

brought their constructive genius to bear in the elaboration of a workable scheme, and in 1861 Post-Office Savings Banks were established by law. The department entered on a new sphere of activity, and every corner in the old building at St. Martin's-le-Grand soon swarmed with busy bees gathering up the honey of the provident.

Soon, lest the legitimate occupants of Sir R. Smirke's edifice should be disestablished by the invasion of the new comers, fresh accommodation was provided in St. Paul's Churchyard, and ultimately in Queen Victoria Street.

It is here that Mr. C. D. Lang presides over no fewer than 1,651 persons, most of them hard at work in balancing ledgers, examining depositors' books, and attending to advices of deposit and notices of withdrawal. Their salaries amount to the not insignificant sum of £216,323 per annum, and those who search for suitable employment for women will rejoice in the fact that of the total force employed—viz., 1,651 persons—no fewer than 706 are of the gentler sex.

A system described as 'cross entry' is in force, which enables depositors to make use of any of the 11,000 money-order Post-Office Savings Banks in the United Kingdom—a privilege which can only be maintained by performing the work attendant on it at one centre. The facility for depositing or withdrawing money wherever a depositor may go within the limits of the British Isles has been well described

as the 'ubiquity' of the Post-Office Savings Bank system.

To me it is surprising that, looking at the vigour, stability, and assured resources of this great establishment, trustees of savings banks all over the country do not close their doors, and hand over responsibility and funds to the Government bank forthwith.

The Money-Order Office still gives evidence of vigorous life, notwithstanding the enormous development of the use of postal orders, the management of which business is conducted by the Receiver and Accountant-General. It can yet boast of annually dealing with £28,000,000.

The Medical Department has a history. It took its rise in the cholera year of 1854, and Dr. Hector Gavin, who afterwards fell a victim to professional zeal in the Crimea, was its first and, it may be added, its beloved physician. So skilful was he that, out of a total staff of 3,000 persons in his charge, only two died during the epidemic.

Soon a permanent head, in the person of the late Dr. Waller Lewis, was appointed. Then the Telegraph Branch had to be looked after medically, and Mr. G. C. Steet (appointed just after the transfer of 1870) for years was, under Dr. Lewis, Medical Officer for the telegraph staff. At length he became Chief Medical Officer, and continued as such until 1892.

There are postal doctors at all the large towns,

although they are not, as at St. Martin's-le-Grand, exclusively employed by the department; and besides the chief officials stationed at headquarters, a great many are also permanently, but not exclusively, engaged to look after the staff employed in the postal districts and sub-districts of the Metropolis. Altogether the Post-Office retains the services of 427 medical men and of 3 medical women—one in London and 2 in the provinces. No pains and expense are spared to preserve the health of the staff.

Vital statistics, however, are 'kittle cattle,' and require to be arranged by an adept before a definite conclusion can safely be drawn from them. Still, a comparison may be made between early and recent figures suggestive of further examination by the trained and competent hand.

In the second annual report of the first permanent Medical Officer of the Post-Office, Dr. Lewis records that in the year 1856 there were 1,612 cases of illness amongst the staff of the minor establishment at the chief office, which consisted of 1,638 persons. This would look like an illness per annum for almost every person employed. But all cases did not occasion absence from duty. Only 716 persons failed in attendance from this cause, and they were absent in the aggregate 11,934 days, equal to $16\frac{1}{2}$ days per head. However, several persons were away from the office for a whole year, and never returned to duty at all; so Dr. Lewis eliminates the figures relating to

1

them, and adjusts the normal absence from sickness to $19\frac{1}{2}$ days per invalid.

In 1892-3 the average duration of absence of each sick man was, at the chief office, 14, and in the Metropolitan districts 15 days; so that if this comparison is actually of like with like, the result is rather disappointing. The percentage of staff absent from illness is, however, much less; due in part to greater care in rejecting candidates physically unsound.

If one point more than another is sedulously regarded at the Post-Office, it is the health of its staff. Economy, as well as benevolence, points to close attention being given to every sanitary condition which the department can influence or control. Medical supervision, space, ventilation, drainage, water, warmth, lighting, holidays, leave on full pay to officials in contact with infectious disease—all these salutary precautions are taken in order to promote the civil servant's health. Yet it would seem that everyone who falls sick is in no better condition now to resist disease than was his father or uncle forty years before him.

In conducting the business of the Post-Office, it is not safe to assume that any fraction of its work, even the mere collection of a letter, can be done for nothing. Sometimes the last straw necessitates a fresh camel, *i.e.*, a new bag, an extra cart; and even to open an undelivered letter represents a charge—microscopic it may be, but, still, a charge on the revenues of the land, which, on the aggregate of many letters, looms

large in the estimates. In London alone it costs £18,020 a year to return undelivered letters and parcels to the senders.

It need hardly be said that the Returned Letter Office is the harbourage of romance and the recipient of truths which are stranger than fiction. For writers sometimes lay bare the secrets of the heart in letters which cannot be delivered, and which, opened for the purpose of procuring a clue to their origin, possess the officials with so wide an experience of the sources of human action, and so deep an insight into the mysteries of human life, as to surpass even the liveliest conjecture.

‘All phases of human character—the loveliest and the unloveliest’—have been revealed to Mr. G. R. Smith in his experience of half a century in this wonderful establishment now housed at Mount Pleasant.

However, the Returned Letter Office does not only return undelivered postal packets; it seeks, as far as possible, even at the last moment, to put them in train for delivery.

The instances of distorted addresses are legion, but the phonetic are perhaps the most curious of all. The direction of a letter for

‘Mr. Owl o Neill,
General Post Office,’

puzzled the most accomplished postman; but read aloud in the Returned Letter Office, ‘Mister Owlon

Eill,' 'Mr. Rowland Hill' came clear to the ear, and the letter was soon sent out again, properly addressed.

Perhaps the parallel, in the sister service, to this story is that of the telegram handed in at the Derby Post-Office by a fine strapping Americo-Portuguese, dressed in gorgeous Indian costume. It was couched in these terms: 'Is are 8.' The foreigner had a smattering of English, and this proved to be his phonetically-spelt equivalent of, 'It's all right'—'Is' (It's) 'a' (all) 're-eight' (right).

Once a letter from a conscientious—at any rate, a considerate—thief came under notice. He had stolen a great-coat and an uncrossed cheque for £15. The one he kept on his back; the other he returned in a misdirected letter written in terms as courteous as he could frame:

'Sir,

'In tramping through London last night I wish to thank you for your coat, which will keep me warm on my road to York. A warm coat is more serviceable to me than money, so I enclose your check, as it might be a heavy loss to you. You know, times are hard and overcoats very scarce; so, hoping the return of your check will cover the loss of your coat,

'Believe me, Yours,

'A CONSCIENTIOUS BORROWER.'

The address of the drawer of the cheque was traced,

and although he lost his coat he saved his money, thanks to the scruples of a tender conscience.

The country branches have singular experiences. One day a thick book, a Clergy List in fact, which had been scooped out to form a kind of well, was stopped for examination in the Derby Post-Office, and found to contain four fat toads, of different colours, all alive. They had been posted by a clergyman in Derbyshire to a lady in Ireland, who professed to be desirous of re-introducing to her native land the species in which she affirmed it had been deficient since the days of St. Patrick. Unhappily, the postal rule was rigorous ; the toads had to be fetched away by the sender, with the only result that the imperial revenue was the richer by the postage of 7s. 6d., payable for conveyance from the rural district, where the toads resided, to the head post-office at Derby, where they were stopped in transit.

There are other curious returned letter experiences. The letter which was found behind a panel in a Paris post-office, and, after having lain there for fifty years, was actually delivered to the addressee, has its parallel. The French Post-Office a long while ago gave orders that innkeepers were to return to that department all undelivered letters of whatever date. Some in consequence came back to this country which had been addressed to English people in Paris during its occupation by the Allied Forces after the battle of Waterloo, and, what is more remarkable still, in a few cases were delivered to



the addressees or given back to the still living writers.

But, in my judgment, both these singular stories are outshone by the vagaries of a mysterious letter which was posted in the western postal district of London on July 1, 1867, addressed to Portland Place, Regent's Park, but which could not be delivered. Then it vanished into space for twenty-four years, and on June 27, 1891, it turned up again in the post-office at Pimlico.

The Returned Letter Office has continued to grow in importance. In the course of the year it deals with nearly 6,500,000 letters, 9,000,000 book-packets and circulars, and perhaps 1,500,000 other postal packets. When I first knew something of the office, it returned only 2,400,000 letters and 600,000 newspapers — 3,000,000 of all sorts, against 17,000,000. So much for increasing care and intelligence in the public at large!

There is a high official, the Electrician and Engineer-in-chief of the Post-Office, who is hoping some day to telegraph without wires; there is a Nautical Adviser, who can assess to a nicety the effect, on the voyage of a mail-packet, of trade-winds or a south-westerly monsoon; and finally, we come upon the Commodore of the modest telegraph fleet of the Post-Office—the Captain of the *Monarch*—not the sturdy old vessel which used to roll about in the North Sea, but a buoyant craft of beautiful lines and yacht-like proportions.

The provinces are not left to take care of themselves; far from it. Scotland, if it be excusable to class her as provincial, has at Edinburgh an official hierarchy all to herself; her chief functionary is again styled Secretary, a title borne with distinction for a great length of time by the late Mr. Francis Abbott.

A bust of this gentleman has been placed in the elegant building which serves as a post-office in Edinburgh, an edifice, by the way, which is associated with the name of the Prince Consort, who laid its foundation-stone. Mr. Abbott entered the General Post-Office in Lombard Street in 1822, and was appointed Secretary in Edinburgh in 1846. There he laboured as a good man and true for twenty-two years. He died in 1898 at the patriarchal age of ninety-three.

After Mr. Abbott's retirement the title of Secretary was changed to Surveyor-General for Scotland, which from that time until the present year has been borne by Mr. A. M. Cunynghame. To him has recently succeeded Mr. William Mitford as Secretary.

Fair Erin can boast of a Secretary, a Solicitor, an Accountant, a Controller, and an Inspector of Mails, installed in a grand building, which, when I last saw it, pensively contemplated the great Nelson's monument in Sackville Street.

There is a cherubic band known as Surveyors, which throughout the British Isles incessantly watches over the fortunes of poor Jack, the postman, and the transit of the letters of the British public, his well-

affected master. Each Surveyor takes a county or two under his ken, and knows to a nicety the postal wants of every town or hamlet therein, and how they can best be met.

Like his chief who sits in Parliament, the Surveyor is pursued by the relentless pouch. In his stationary office he feels the slightest drag on the punctuality of the far-distant mail-cart, and is aware of the delayed walk of the rural postman by the flooding of the lane; he knows why the much-enduring sub-postmaster cannot give up another foot of shop-counter to the postal service of a fretful public; even the misfit of the mail-porter's new suit of uniform at the main railway junction in the county is a weight upon his official mind.

Great authorities have declared the Surveyors to be the eyes of the Post-Office. Not only, however, do they see and report, but also they plan and act. An efficient postmaster is a man to be trusted and encouraged; an efficient Surveyor, one to be regarded as a pillar of the service. Good luck in the way of honour, preferment, and liberality of stipend has not yet attended the path of these valuable public servants, who for the most part work out of sight, and during long hours of the day and night; having anxieties which never cease, and functions which, rightly understood and performed, are essential to the prosperity of the Post-Office.

As a postmaster in London reports to the Controller, so the postmaster of a country town and sub-

jacent area reports to the Surveyor. There is no one between the Surveyor and the Secretary, nor between the Controller and the Secretary. Hence, the Chief holds every thread in his hand. Of course, each superior officer sifts the reportable matter. Some he keeps, the rest he sends on.

Lastly, there come the postmasters, and with them the tale of the controlling force is practically told. They, too, under encouragement which has grown of recent years, hold for the most part the threads of the local web with a sagacity that rarely fails. Is another town delivery required? Should the post to the squire's house take in Hawthorn Cottages (nine letters a week), or should it not? They can tell to a penny what such extension of service is likely to cost, what time will be lost by the lengthened journey, and then the higher powers are left to decide the issue. They control large bodies of men, are answerable for the punctual and effective distribution and collection of letters and the prompt and accurate transmission of telegrams. Moreover, they are accountable for very large sums of money.

Peace, we know, has its victories as well as war. In the year in which this page is written, the postmasters of many great towns of the United Kingdom—amongst them those of Leeds and Newcastle-on-Tyne—have retired from their respective offices. Both the latter look back on a service of great duration, on difficulties surmounted and postal efficiency ensured.

The post-office at Leeds is conducted at a cost to

the State of £65,000, that at Newcastle of £59,000, a year. Let us see what the country takes by this liberal expenditure at the cities on the Aire and the Tyne. When in 1879 Mr. J. Leal was appointed to the postmastership of Leeds, he found a head-office staff of 383 persons, dealing with 670,000 letters and 24,000 telegrams in a week. There are now at work 812 persons, who in a week grapple with 1,250,000 postal packets and 64,000 telegrams. The sub-offices have been doubled in number, the pillar letter-boxes trebled. The daily deliveries have been increased by 50 per cent. In the rural districts deliveries have been extended and accelerated, and receptacles for letters multiplied almost fourfold. So there is something to show for the money. The public press declared that the ex-postmaster had proved himself 'an admirable officer, one earnest in his work and beloved by his staff.' Public opinion ratified these views by a gift of £500. Good service, extending over forty-eight years, does not pass unnoticed in Yorkshire.

Not less remarkable are the figures which Mr. Thomas Hunter might have adduced on bringing to a close, at Newcastle-on-Tyne, fifty years' service in the Post-Office, thirteen of which have been spent as postmaster; and not less substantial than in the foregoing instance has been the public acknowledgment of his services.

Letters posted in Newcastle, letters delivered there, and letters passing through from other post-towns to towns beyond, now total up in a week to 1,100,000,

as compared with 600,000 thirteen years ago. In 1824 there was but a single postman in this city.

Parcels of all sorts have grown under Mr. Hunter's hand from 600,000 to 1,200,000 in a year, and money-order and postal-order transactions from fewer than 200,000 to more than 500,000. Telegrams in both directions, stimulated by Mr. Shaw-Lefevre's sixpenny rate, have expanded from an annual total of 1,500,000 to 3,500,000. Finally—and this is the touchstone of the whole—cash receipts have risen from £471,000 to £828,000 a year. What ordinary person would covet the responsibility of taking charge, whether at Newcastle or elsewhere, of these stupendous amounts of other persons' money?

Looking back sixty years, one is struck by the superior cheapness of administration in the old days. Of course, there was less work to do. Take the comparative cost in the early sixties and the present day of a few post-towns:

Post Town.	Name of old Postmaster.	Annual cost.		Name of present Postmaster.
		Then.	Now.	
		£	£	
Barnet.....	G. C. Hudson ...	101	2,537	J. L. Winkup
Bath	T. M. Musgrave	816	22,849	E. Blakeney
Bournemouth	(Did not exist)...		12,404	W. Dunn
Bristol.....	T. Todd Walton	1,947	22,849	R. C. Tombs
Exeter	P. Measor.....	1,192	23,979	J. Irish
Hull.....	T. Rodwell	591	30,897	J. A. Duesbury
Leeds	J. Temple.....	1,301	68,802	F. Salisbury
Liverpool ...	W. Banning.....	1,854	167,790	J. D. Rich
Manchester...	R. P. Wilcock ...	1,508	170,741	H. Harley
Newcastle ...	J. L. Lorraine...	899	63,127	T. Stevenson
Southampton	M. A. Watson ...	741	25,415	E. R. Carter
Glasgow	— Bannatyne ...	2,835	152,016	F. Braid
Belfast.....	James Dickie ...	490	44,720	H. J. Shepperd

Of course, it is only right to admit that the comparison, though exact as far as it goes, is not strictly of like with like. Present expenditure includes the cost of the telegraphs, whereas in 1836 Cooke and Wheatstone were yet experimenting at Euston Square and Chalk Farm. Nor does the earlier account include the outlay for the rural posts and sub-post-offices, which the later one covers, so there is something to add to the smaller sums.

In the peaceful calling of a postmaster the inquiring mind would scarce expect to discover military experience gathered in the tented field; yet the search would be rewarded, for the names of sundry colleagues of warlike cast float across the sea of memory as these lines are written.

Many years ago the Postmaster of York, the late Mr. N. H. Harrington, was one of a British legion in the Peninsula, and wore a medal for good service. He was led by the brave General Sir De Lacy Evans, who later on fought in the Crimea.

One anecdote of his experience as postmaster came to me from Mr. Harrington's own lips. He had been directed to interview and, if possible, appease the anger of a gentleman who constantly complained of arrangements which the department was powerless to remedy, in the region of Holme-upon-Spalding-Moor. All the official letters, were their accents never so honeyed, had failed to propitiate him. Mr. Harrington set out, and, finding himself in a park, had to scale a high barbed and padlocked gate which stopped

the way. On reaching the house he rang a bell. A nightcapped form appeared at a first-floor window. 'Your business?' it demanded. 'I come from the post-office,' was the reply, 'about the North mail letters, and the Secretary wishes me to see you and make a report.' 'Be off with you! Tell the Secretary that you have seen me as you see me now, and' (bang went a pistol) 'there is your report!' A swift strategic movement by Harrington to the rear brought the interview to a close.

Whose is this tall straight figure? It is that of the postmaster of another great Yorkshire town, the late Mr. E. J. Smith, a man capable and experienced, acquainted with general officers of renown, and while at Constantinople with the great Elchi, Sir Stratford Canning, himself. He was at one time Deputy-Controller of the London Circulation Office; then Postmaster of the British Army in the East; for a time he acted as postal adviser to the Turkish Government; and at length, preceding Mr. Leal, became Postmaster of Leeds. He was one who saw the glorious but ill-fated charge of the Light Brigade of cavalry at Balaklava, and told me that he had heard poor Nolan transmit the fateful order; had seen him, when the squadrons began to move, wildly wave his sword as if misunderstood, and then had beheld the bursting shell which ended the career of one of the most brilliant and promising young cavalry officers in the Crimea.

My blithe and valued colleague of many years—

Captain Angell, of the Civil Service Volunteers, was a Crimean veteran also. He enjoyed but briefly retirement from active life; for, after a few months' repose, the office, the club, the assembly of good fellows knew him no more. He was one of those cheery men who never grow old, bearing himself as lightly when half a century of service lay behind him as when his orderlies flew hither and thither with mail-bags for the camp on the bleak plateau which overlooks Sebastopol.

'Mike,' said Captain Angell to his servant, 'the General is to dine with me to-morrow. What can we get to eat? Go down to Balaklava and look about.'

'Ah! dinner is it? then be easy, Captain dear,' replied the resourceful Mike.

So that night his master's head, free from all anxiety about the dinner, lay peacefully on the regulation pillow, as though the thousand guns of the Malakoff, the Mamelon and the Redan were but the harmless prize-winning small-bores popping away, as perhaps they do to this day, along the chalk hills which go to form the pleasant Caterham Valley. Next day came. There was a noble dinner. The General, the Major, the Doctor and the host revelled on a fat roast goose, with stuffing which suggested new-born sage and the daintiest of infant onions. To flank it were, as Mike would say, 'lashings' of whisky and tobacco of the finest quality.

'Boys,' said the General, 'ye'll all dine with me to-morrow sharp at six o'clock. I, too, have a fat

goose, and if no whisky, yet just a taste of passable madeira.'

The next night came. All were punctual at the General's tent. Behold that warrior in a tearing temper! Some scoundrel had the day before looted the precious goose. His servant had only told him when he came from the front. A qualm disturbed my Angell's just and generous heart. However, a juicy ham was to the fore, a plum-pudding had come out with the mail-boat, and there was also the old madeira. So, after all, they had a good time, and the General's serenity returned.

'Mike,' sternly demanded the Captain at a later hour, 'where did last night's goose come from?'

'The goose is it, sir?' said Mike, and fled his master's eye.

There is yet another postmaster who has seen 'battle's magnificently stern array.' One memorable day, in September, 1882, with his Volunteers from the G.P.O. around him, Major Sturgeon, amidst the shot and shell of Kassassin, sorted the 'inward' army mail. Have the sultry suns of Egypt, the white sands of the scorching plains between Kassassin and Tel-el-Kebir, and all the hardships of that brief campaign, yet faded from the memory of the postmaster of Norwich?

Alas! poor Captain Vyle, the staunch, the gentle, and the brave! He has passed from sight but not without many a sigh of sorrow for our common loss.

Not to be forgotten are the sub-postmasters, who

are almost invariably engaged in trade. A worthier class of men and one more vigilant in looking after the alien work they undertake to supervise cannot be easily found.

Then come the great battalions of the clerical staff, the superintendents, the inspectors and overseers, the sorting-clerks and telegraphists. How as to them? By their toil, whether by day or night, the work goes on; the Vestal fire of the Post is kept alight by watchfulness which never fails.

Not alone in the higher grades have been found those whose career includes a period under arms. Let me instance the case of James Smith, who died at Basingstoke on September 27, 1893, in his 102nd year.

He enlisted in the old 66th—now the Berkshire regiment—in 1809; served in India, and finally mounted guard over Napoleon Bonaparte at St. Helena. Sustaining an injury, he was discharged as an invalid from further military duty. Getting better, he worked upon the Hampshire roads from 1820 to 1846. Then, one would suppose, after thirty-seven years of soldiering and road-making, would have come the time for rest. Not so. There is before me the original paper notifying his appointment by the Marquis of Clanricarde to the office of postal messenger from Basingstoke to Dunmer and North Waltham in 1846.

On this rural walk of sixteen miles my colleague worked for more than twenty years. It is not every

man of fifty-four who can embark on a task of daily letter-carrying and keep at it in all weathers for the better part of a quarter of a century. When at length he retired within sight of fourscore years of age, he contrived to exist — with what other aid is not known — on the small pension of 3s. 6d. a week, which was all that the Superannuation Act could allow the Post-Office to pay to him.

The old man held on for yet another quarter of a century, and then a pathetic ending came. He had no military pension, but a grant of 6d. a day, to date from February, 1892, had in September, 1893, been procured from the War Office. But when an army order for the arrears of pension due to the old soldier arrived at Basingstoke, the stout centenarian had two days before grounded the arms of life and departed for the barracks of Light and Eternity.

Edward Phillips, whose memory is honoured by a brass in St. George's Chapel at Windsor, served both King Charles II. and King James II. in the Post-Office; and then as yeoman of the guard of William and Mary, of Anne and of George I., he rendered suit and service to the Crown. There are other men whose names should be preserved.

What shall be said of the Scotch mail messenger, who, blinded and frozen by the snowstorm, hung the mail-bag on a tree, so that his charge might at least be saved, and then lay down to die beneath it? or of Mr. Robert Paton, the Northumberland mail-cart contractor of 1889, who, not daunted by a raging

storm, essayed to drive across the moor because he saw his duty plain before him, and gave up his life in doing it?

It is not forgotten how Samuel Bennett, the mail-guard, badly injured in a railway collision, thought less of his mangled body than of collecting the contents of the mail-bags. Before being pensioned in 1866 he had met with a series of accidents whilst in the discharge of his official duties. The first occurred in 1836, when he sustained a fracture of the arm, owing to the upsetting of the Liverpool and Birmingham mail-coach, upon which he was riding as guard. He fared no better on the rail. In 1847 he was severely shaken, owing to the Bath and Birmingham mail-train running off the line. In 1853 he nearly lost his life in a collision between Birmingham and Bristol, having been so severely cut and bruised about the head as to be rendered insensible and taken up for dead. Nevertheless, on recovering consciousness he collected some of the mail-bags and proceeded with them to Bristol. The *Gloucester Journal* said: 'Samuel Bennett, the guard of the mail-bags, appeared dead when found, and was dreadfully cut, but on recovering he manifested great anxiety for the bags. When the special train arrived in which the wounded passengers were conveyed to an inn, Bennett, with great courage, determined to take the bags by this train, which was done.' And the *Bristol Mercury* wrote of him as follows: 'The mail-guard, Samuel Bennett, was very much cut over

the face and head, and bled profusely. Happily, he was not rendered long unconscious or disabled, and with a conscientious and self-denying attention to duty not often met with, he refused any attention to his hurts until he had gathered up the mutilated letter-bags and their contents and made provision for bringing them on to this city.' Surely this was a hero!

Of the devotion of Marine Mail-Guard Mortleman and Mr. Silk I write on another page.

From the laurel leaf to the myrtle! In the present year there died one of the two postmen-poets of the Victorian age—Edward Capern, the rural letter-carrier from Bideford to Buckland Brewer. He wrote, apparently of himself:

'He owns neither houses nor lands;
His wealth is a character good,
A pair of industrious hands,
A drop of poetical blood.'

The British public has long since taken the postmen to its bosom, and, whether in the cities or in rural parts, rejoices when modest cakes and ale fall to their deserving lot.

recognised. 'Empties to be returned,' when printed with other notifications and sent by post, was admitted to be a phrase not imparting any private communication, and therefore permissible as a circular; but '*Please* return empties' was regarded as a private and confidential communication—only a shade less personal than a love-letter.

One does not say 'please' in print to the million—it is to the individual that so persuasive, so caressing, a verb is addressed; hence, in the past, penny postage had to be paid by the sender of this choice specimen of polite notifications about empty beer-barrels, or the Post-Office would have been on his trail. It is but fair to the Solicitor to say that he was not responsible for this refined distinction, which has now been discarded.

But there are other matters than definitions which come into the legal branch for settlement: there is the civil, criminal, Parliamentary, and advisory business of the Post-Office. There are contracts, conveyances, leases and warrants to be regulated; Bills preliminary to Acts, construction of Acts, amendments, prosecutions, civil actions, defence of monopolies—where shall the list end? How little is the public aware of the legal intricacies, the subtle questions of law, which surround the mere posting of a letter!

Let us, however, first have regard to persons.

The department has been fortunate in its chiefs of the law branch. From 1825, when Mr. Mark Beau-

champ Peacock was appointed Solicitor of the Post-Office, until the present date, four men of parts have been its responsible legal guides. The Solicitor has always held, as things go in the Civil Service, a fairly-paid post, ranging, as it does in salary, on an equality with the Secretary's. His duty is to advise the Postmaster-General and the Secretary on all legal questions arising in the course of the administration of the Post-Office. He has also to instruct counsel to protect the Postmaster-General's interests in relation to the purchase and hiring of buildings for Post-Office purposes, and generally to transact all such business as a private solicitor would transact for a private client. When the complex and often delicate relations of the Post-Office with the public and Parliament; with railway companies, telephone companies, and other bodies and persons, are considered, it is obvious that the position of a legal adviser is both onerous and responsible.

With Mr. Peacock, caution in official advice was so marked a characteristic that it is not likely that he took any active part in the penny postage discussions which occurred in the thirties—certainly no part hostile to the reformer. It is, however, on record that in 1838, with great sagacity, he held and expressed the opinion that the Post-Office should recommend itself to the public and secure a virtual monopoly, not by strong powers to be obtained from the Legislature, but 'by the greater security, expedition, punctuality and cheapness' with which it transmitted letters.

‘He was a courtly old gentleman,’ writes one who remembers Mr. Peacock even better than I do, ‘who always gave a safe opinion and would not be pinned in a corner.’

A joke against him, as exemplifying his cautious habit of mind, has it that, being greeted one morning by a colleague with the not unusual remark, ‘It is a fine day,’ he put on his glasses, looked out of the window, and, after full consideration, replied, ‘Yes, I think it is a fine day.’

From 1825 to 1862, when Mr. Peacock died in harness, no legal difficulty of any kind that can be called to mind embroiled the Post-Office. His chief work, no doubt, was a share in preparing the Penny Postage Bill of 1839; a thorn in his side, perhaps, was the notorious Joseph Ady, a begging-letter writer of my time, who posted his letters unpaid by the bushel, and had the Solicitor’s hand ever against him.

To Mr. Peacock succeeded Mr. W. H. Ashurst, of the firm of Messrs. Ashurst, Morris and Co., in Old Jewry. Mr. Ashurst’s father had rendered good help in furthering the penny postage scheme, and Rowland Hill never forgot a service done to him. It must have been a pleasure to Sir Rowland to procure the vacant appointment for the son of his old friend, and plant at the Post-Office the kindly and capable man who afterwards dealt with the mass of legal business to which the telegraph transfer gave rise.

Mr. Ashurst—a brother-in-law of the Right Hon. James Stansfeld, M.P., whose name at one time, when he held Ministerial office, was much associated with Mazzini's—is said to have been a friend of Garibaldi, and probably knew both the patriots. He was strongly in favour of all avenues of employment being freely opened to women—indeed, he held liberal, perhaps even advanced, views on many important questions. His wit, geniality and social qualities endeared him to his staff and private friends.

To run into the Solicitor's room with an official paper and gossip for a minute or two on any public question was always a refreshment in the busiest times; and the equable nature of the incumbent was such that, however pressing were his engagements, he was never known to be in a hurry or impatient of interruption. In July, 1879, to the regret of all, Mr. Ashurst died.

After him came Mr. Horace Watson, one who was found, by those who knew him sufficiently, to be a truly amiable personage. He had held the post of Solicitor to the Commissioners of Woods and Forests, and, falling ill, had retired from official life. Regaining his health, he came to the Post-Office. But his period of service was short. Appointed in 1879, he died in 1881, living long enough, however, to become sincerely attached to the department, to signalize himself officially by establishing the Postmaster-General's legal right to a monopoly of public



telephones, and socially by convincing all those around that under a reserved, perhaps a cold, exterior there beat a warm heart.

Then, in 1882, came Mr. (now Sir) Robert Hunter, of whom more anon.

Connecting all points of this long period of nearly seventy years, two able servants of the State have served in the office of Assistant-Solicitor. Mr. Robert William Peacock (Mark Beauchamp's brother), who died in 1887, came into the service in 1827, and attended for forty-eight years to the criminal side of the Solicitor's branch—to the prosecution, in short, of offenders against the Post-Office Acts. Never had the Crown a better servant. He acquired in court a solid reputation, for the briefs which he prepared were unassailable—every fact could be established, no link was omitted.

'If,' said a Post-Office Counsel (post-prandially, it must be owned), 'Mr. Peacock should insert in my brief that the ball of St. Paul's would walk down, I should expect it to do so.'

Mr. R. W. Peacock's mantle fell on his colleague, Mr. E. Breton Osborn, who was admitted as a solicitor in the High Court in Hilary term, 1858. Happily, the Crown still reaps the full benefit of the latter's tried services. He came to the Post-Office in 1857, while the elder Peacock was still the Solicitor, and so commands the ripe experience of thirty-seven years of legal work—of eighteen years, that is, in service under one or both of the Peacocks, and nine-

teen years under Mark Peacock's successors. Three or four of the many remarkable cases conducted by these two Assistant-Solicitors strike me as standing out from the rest.

There was the Nether Stowey money-order fraud. A dismissed clerk who knew the ways of the service visited Nether Stowey, a village post-office subordinate to Bridgwater, an hour or so before post-time, and said that he was from the Surveyor's office, and had come to investigate complaints, which he hoped the sub-postmaster could satisfactorily explain.

During the discussion, which probably flustered the official not a little, he contrived to abstract a number of money-order forms and advices. Then he conciliated the sub-postmaster by declaring that he was quite satisfied with the explanation furnished, and that he would send in a good report to Mr. Creswell, the Surveyor. He begged that the mail-bag might be kept open for his report until the very latest moment, so that he might make it as full and conclusive as possible. Finally, he borrowed the dated stamp of the office, assigning some plausible reason, and hied him to his inn for a time.

There the delinquent filled up the blank orders for £10 each, the maximum sum allowable, drew out the proper advices, stamped each order and advice with the dated stamp of Nether Stowey Post-Office, put the sub-postmaster's name to all the forms, and then betook himself, with a dummy envelope addressed to the Surveyor, back to the post-office.

He restored the dated stamp, praising its condition. While the official was occupied in impressing it on the Surveyor's letter he popped his money-order advices into the mail-bag, saw it tied and sealed, and then went off from the nearest station by the same train as the bag to Bristol, Gloucester and elsewhere, to cash the forged orders.

At Bridgwater, the head post-office for Nether Stowey, was a young clerk, now the postmaster of a city in the West. He opened the Nether Stowey bag, remarked the bundle of £10 advices, representing a total sum of about £500, saw there were no corresponding entries on the sub-postmaster's account, and demonstrated to the senior officer on duty that the orders were forged.

But with a strange fatuity the official in authority bade him send on the advices, and not until next day, when some of the orders had been cashed, could the police be put on the evil-doer's track. Eventually, this adroit personage was caught in Dublin, but not until he had realized a good round sum, as, of course, the orders and advices had all the appearance of being genuine. The case in its earlier stages was in Mr. R. W. Peacock's official charge. Afterwards the Solicitor in Dublin successfully conducted it.

A very similar fraud occurred some years later at St. Albans, where an utterer of false Bank of England notes forged eighteen money orders for £158 11s. 1d. This offence was brought home to the offender by Mr. Osborn.

The case of the great registered - letter robbery which took place in 1886 fell also to Mr. Osborn. Mr. Mulock, then the Director, or Mr. Philips, now the Director, of the Confidential Inquiry Branch, could tell the tale with greater effect than I can; for this, in Post-Office annals, was a *cause célèbre*. Mr. Mulock had to originate inquiry, while Mr. Osborn regulated the action of the law.

Briefly stated, however, the facts were that in the year mentioned the Continental mails were cleverly robbed while in transit between London and Berlin. The registered-letter bag contained sixty-two letters, and when this bag was opened in ordinary course in Germany, it was found that forty-eight of them had been stolen or tampered with. One letter alone contained negotiable property of the value of £4,000. Another packet, sent by a foreign banking firm in London, had contained twenty Russian 100-rouble notes. The notes were taken out, the cover itself being left behind in the mail-bag.

A few days after the robbery the thief walked into the lion's mouth, for he called at the foreign bankers' office in Threadneedle Street, and produced for change three Russian 100-rouble notes, which were immediately recognised as part of the lost property. The culprit was detained and handed over to the police, who charged him with unlawful possession. At the remand at the Mansion House, Mr. Osborn took up the prosecution, and altered the charge to one of theft from the mail-bag; and in order to bring the

case within the jurisdiction of the English courts, set up the theory that the robbery of the mails, although discovered whilst in transit through Germany, had, in fact, been perpetrated between London and Dover. The prisoner was tried, found guilty, and sentenced to a term of penal servitude.

No fewer than eighty witnesses (nearly one half coming from abroad) were called to establish the case. All their testimony had to be examined, wrought into a continuous chain, and presented to counsel in the prosecuting brief in such sequence of proof that not a single link in the evidence should be defective. It must have involved no small mental effort to bring eighty independent statements into line in one harmonious, intelligible and unassailable narrative.

Regina versus M—, in 1872, probably cost the country a pretty penny; but if it exhibited the glorious uncertainty of the law, it also affirmed a principle—and that in the legal purview, no doubt, goes far to cover a multitude of charges. Ten shillings had to be paid out of the Savings Bank to a depositor, and the sum of £8 16s. 10d. was given to him by mistake. With the larger amount the recipient walked away. Mr. Osborn was promptly on his track, and charged him before the court with stealing money—a view which the jury as promptly adopted. The Recorder of London, however, before whom the case was tried, apparently dissented from the finding; at any rate, he had a doubt, inasmuch as he reserved

for the decision of a higher court the material point whether the offence of which the prisoner had been convicted was larceny or not.

From the Recorder, the matter went before three judges. They could not agree in opinion. Then the whole bench of fifteen judges had to be invoked. The case was argued out before them. No less a person than Mr. Attorney-General (the late Lord Chief Justice Coleridge) appeared in support of the conviction. Even this numerous and learned body were for a time unsettled in mind, but eventually and after some months of consideration they affirmed the verdict of the jury in the court below, not, indeed, unanimously, but by a large majority. Then the prisoner was brought up, sentenced, and almost immediately released, having been, as it was, five months in prison.

But had the point been settled in his favour, how then? How would the wrongful imprisonment have been redressed? Justice, like Lord Nelson, finds it convenient sometimes to turn a sightless orb on what she does not care to see.

Legal cases, even in the Post-Office, are not always devoid of romance. *Regina versus H—— alias G——*, a Post-Office prosecution of 1880, tells a story which, if the criminal element could be eliminated, would be altogether humorous, and would certainly have been one entirely congenial to the late Charles Dickens. It was that of a postman retiring from so respectable and umbrageous a locality as St. John's Wood, to take

his ease in a species of lake-dwelling in the Thames marshes.

Here, in a rough cabin, the hermit entrenched himself, a dog being his sole companion, and here a variety of commodities—a collection of milk-cans picked up on his rounds, scaffold-poles, hat-brims, cutlery, sawdust, etc.—were carefully hoarded; water-rats freely scuttling about the treasure-house, meanwhile.

But however honestly the bulk of the hermit's acquisitions may have been come by, 2,000 undelivered post-letters found amongst them told a sorry tale, and were ultimately the cause of his undoing. For one morning this new Robinson Crusoe, on surveying his entrenchments, espied, or might have done so, the imprint in the sand—that is, on the soft mud which fringed his works—of a man's foot! To select a fine microscope from the heap of unassorted lumber in his wigwam, to apply its strongest lens to the indentation, and to recognise on the heel of the impression the tribal mark inverted (*vi* *Q* *.2*), of an active and well-remembered race was, it may be conjectured, but the work of a moment. Nor did the much-dreaded invader keep poor Crusoe long in suspense. For soon a canoe put off from the opposite shore, fully manned by blue-coated warriors, who were armed with clubs and equipped with a kind of bangle, or armlet, but quite unlike any South Sea Islanders known to the hermit, and certainly never seen in Juan Fernandez, and crossed the silver Thames.

The enemy surrounded Robinson Crusoe's hut, impounded his goods, and resistance being in vain, carried him into captivity, and kept him there for eighteen dreary months.

The Confidential Inquiry Branch, just referred to, is, properly speaking, an offshoot of the Secretary's office, but it works hand and glove with the Solicitor's office, although it also deals with cases which present no suggestion of a contravention of the law, such as those of missing letters, not stolen, but mislaid or destroyed.

Of such, two occur to me as types of a thousand. Some years ago a country postmaster related how a merchant, who lived a mile or two out of town, having sold produce at a Channel port for £650, received a telegram from his agents informing him that a cheque for that amount was to follow by post.

The post arrived, but with it, the merchant alleged, neither cheque nor letter. Inquiry began. The postman of the walk recollected the missing packet distinctly—its shape, colour and postmark. He had, according to habit, so he said, poked it under the house-door with two other letters and a newspaper. The merchant's wife had picked up three packets, and was positive there had not been a fourth.

The postmaster came; he examined the house carefully. Then he looked into the back garden. His eye alighted on a litter of puppies. A thought struck him.

'Have the dog-kennel cleared out, please.'

'Nonsense! why?'

'Kindly have it cleared.'

'Well, if it must be—Thomas, take out the straw.'

On the floor of the kennel, torn in a hundred bits, lay the missing letter; in the bits, the shreds of the cheque. A current of air along the passage had blown the letter, a light one, about; the puppies, seeing it, had pounced upon it, and had had a good time.

But if the puppies were chargeable with a mild kind of larceny, their behaviour was innocence itself compared with the conduct some time previously of a tame raven in Kelvedon, in Essex. This malefactor committed highway robbery with violence. As the postman was in the act of delivering a letter containing a cheque (in this case for £30), the raven pounced down from a height, dashed at the letter, forced it from the man's hand, flew with it around the town, alighted, and deliberately tore both the letter and cheque to pieces.

Delay in delivery, it cannot be denied, does sometimes occur. But the Post-Office has only once, to my knowledge, taken twelve years to deliver a letter. That particular missive contained a £5 note. It had slipped behind the panelling of a sorting-carriage, and there it lay until the vehicle went into the repairing-shop for overhaul and was stripped to its ribs. Then the letter was found,

returned to the Post-Office, and delivered to the rejoicing addressee.

Yet are losses sometimes charged on the department of letters which never come into its possession. Once a merchant complained of the loss of one containing some hundreds of pounds in Bank of England notes. He was clear in his recollection on all essential points. The case was shrouded in impenetrable mystery.

At last a choice expert made a special call at the counting-house. 'Believe me, sir,' said he, 'I have an object in what I ask. Will you kindly sit at your desk and recall each operation connected with the missing letter?'

'With pleasure. I sit here. I take a sheet of this note-paper and one of those covers. Then I write my letter and fold it up so. Next I go to my safe and take out the notes, enter their numbers, fold them, put them into the letter, and the letter into the cover. Then I seal them all up as you now see me do.'

'Just so; and what next?'

'Why, my clerk comes in and clears off my letters for the post.'

'But you wrote this one at noon, and the post does not go out before night.'

'Oh yes, of course. I quite forgot to say that a money letter, for greater security, I put in a left-hand drawer.'

'Which one?'

‘Which? why, this one. I open it so, and I—
Bless my soul! goodness me! I am very sorry for
all the trouble I’ve given. Here is the letter!’

Cases such as these require the most careful investigation, and that, too, by officers of great experience and acumen.

In 1856, it happened that so lofty a being as the Lord Chancellor of the day complained of the loss of a letter. Evidence had been adduced which convinced the august legal mind of the *bonâ-fide* posting of the letter, which Lord Cranworth stated with absolute confidence had never reached him. The case against the Post-Office seemed clear, when, after a time, his lordship turned over a heap of old papers, and found the letter beneath them! My lord thereupon handsomely absolved all persons from blame, except himself.

Droll circumstances sometimes arise. Once a friend wrote to me in substance as follows:

‘I posted a letter at A, at half-past eleven, for B, in the same postal district. It ought to have been delivered at three. It was not delivered at three, nor at any time on that day. What shameful neglect! I have some political interest at C., where your Postmaster-General seeks re-election. My friends and I mean to vote for his opponent. Such mismanagement on his part is insufferable.’

The answer may have been to the effect that, in my belief, if there was one thing dearer to the heart of the

Postmaster-General than another, it was the efficiency of the post between A and B, and that his sorrow for the failure in delivery of the missing letter, when he came to know of it, would be deep and sincere; that meanwhile it was hoped that my correspondent and his friends would not endanger the constitution by opposing the Ministerial candidature, but suspend judgment until inquiry could be made. It turned out that the letter had been duly delivered at three o'clock on the day of posting, and that a maidservant had laid it aside and forgotten it. So the Postmaster-General was re-elected after all! However, to revert to the legal branches.

Although the practice of the Irish law-courts tallies in all essential points with that of the High Court of Justice, legislation operative in the one kingdom is not necessarily applicable to the other. For this reason alone it would be needful to maintain at Dublin a Solicitor of the Post-Office, who should keep the administration in touch with the law as it affects Ireland.

Apart from this speciality, however, there is abundance of legal work associated with Irish postal matters to sustain the Solicitor's office in full activity, especially as, in Ireland, the Solicitor, unlike the head of the firm in England, has to rove the country from end to end; at any rate, to spend portions of the year in Belfast, Cork, Londonderry, etc., as well as at head-quarters, following the movements of the judges.

The bright and shining light of the law, when official business took me to Dublin most, *i.e.*, in the early seventies, was the late Mr. Robert Thompson. A sound lawyer, a master of pure trenchant English, he possessed, like most cultivated Irishmen, an inexhaustible store of racy anecdote; and what in him, perhaps, attracted me most was the fact that he threw himself heart and soul into his official work. For it was a period of much anxiety and incessant labour in the Post-Office when we first met, and those who gave their aid quickly gave it twice, and endeared themselves to their fellow-workers.

Taxing my own knowledge, but relying chiefly on that of others, of the official attainments of Mr. Thompson, it would be within bounds for me to say that as a lawyer he was held in high estimation by the profession, as he was by all with whom he came in contact in official and social life. He combined great firmness of character with a most genial disposition. Besides his thorough knowledge of the law, his main qualifications were a rapid discernment of the true bearings of a case, a shrewd appreciation of the strength or weakness of an opponent's contention, and thoroughness in working out all points in matters remitted to him for settlement.

Of this he gave good proof in the case of *Regina versus N—, alias V—*, in which he carried to a climax the Nether Stowey case, and brought to justice the prime offender in Dublin. N—'s career of crime was a strange one. He had been at one time



a clerk in the Bridgwater Post-Office, and had stolen the mail-bag for London from the platform of the railway-station while the messenger who had charge of it was sewing a button on the coat of a townsman who was going to London.

After that offence followed the Nether Stowey fraud; and when released from penal servitude, as the consequence of forging money-orders, N—— stole a registered-letter bag in London containing diamonds. So the arm of the law failed to amend his ways.

Like the blind Postmaster-General, Mr. Thompson found rest and refreshment in the rod, and in his rare and brief holidays the pleasant running streams and mountain rivers of County Wicklow yielded up to him 'here and there a dusky trout,' and perhaps 'here and there a grayling.' A ramble over Killiney Hill produced more than once the solution of difficult official questions.

To Mr. Thompson succeeded the bright and versatile lawyer who now draws the briefs of Irish Post-Office counsel. The rise of Mr. Baillie-Gage in the service has been rapid beyond precedent. On his admission to the roll of solicitors Mr. Thompson engaged him as his temporary assistant. Probably his first official discussion was on the occasion in which we all three met, accompanied by the late Mr. Sanger, in Cork in 1870, to talk over the form of certain proposed railway agreements. Two years later he became chief clerk; three years later still, Solicitor. To spring

from an unestablished position, fresh from the articles of novitiate, to the top of the official tree in five years implied the possession of qualities which the Duke of Rutland was not slow to discern and appreciate. Nor have the Irish judiciary refrained from expressing the opinion that no proceedings taken before them are better conducted than those which originate in the office of the Post-Office Solicitor.

In Edinburgh the department has not been less fortunate in its Solicitors. Legal procedure in Scotland, as most people know, differs from the law and practice of English courts. Scotch law business could not with advantage be managed from London, so a Solicitor on the spot is a necessity; and from the year (1855) of my own entry into the Post-Office until 1892, the year before I left it—that is, for thirty-seven years—the department in Scotland found in the late Mr. John Cay, member of the Society of Writers to her Majesty's Signet, a sound and judicious adviser. He came of a good legal stock. His father was Sheriff of Linlithgowshire and Convener of the Sheriffs of Scotland.

A valued colleague, who knew Mr. John Cay well, describes him as one of the truest, best, most conscientious, and most courteous of men—an admirable type of the good Scottish lawyer of the old school. He similarly impressed me. On his demise the office of Solicitor in Scotland was filled up by the selection of Mr. Pitman.

The Solicitor-in-chief of the Post-Office, Sir Robert

Hunter, knighted in 1894, was a member of the firm which is now that of Messrs. Horne and Birkett, solicitors, of Lincoln's Inn Fields. He received his appointment to the Post-Office from Professor Fawcett, on the death of Mr. Watson. It is needless to say that the choice of the Minister has been approved by the experience of thirteen years, seeing that it has been ratified by a mark of the favour of the Sovereign.

Although it is as yet too early to take a comprehensive review of the successful labours of one who is still in the heyday of his career dealing with the knotty problems which Post-Office legislation and practice but too often present, it may, at any rate, be mentioned that one uniform plan of procedure has marked his course from the first—that of mastering every point of postal administration as it came under his notice.

To be a sound lawyer, and at the same time to possess a thorough acquaintance with the actual working of a great department in all its branches, is not given to every man in a similar position. To apply the law with discretion, a powerful aid is a thorough knowledge of the subject of litigation. Sir Henry James, Q.C., who, as counsel for the Post-Office, argued the telephone case for the Postmaster-General, made himself a complete master of the theory of electricity as accepted in practical telegraphy before he went into court. This is a line of conduct which, within my observation, Sir Robert has invariably followed. In his time a greater number



of large and difficult questions has arisen than probably in any previous period in the history of the Post-Office.

A glance at the Statute-Book alone would satisfy most people that, so far, the twelve or thirteen years of Sir Robert Hunter's tenure of office has not been an idle period, even from a single point of view—the Parliamentary—inasmuch as during that period twelve postal Acts have become law, besides hybrid Bills and private Bills which called for his intervention.

The first-fruit of Sir Robert's handiwork was the Parcel Post Act of 1882 (45 and 46 Vict., cap. 74). Not a single doubt has, to my knowledge, ever arisen as to the true meaning and construction of any one of its sections. It was a sound piece of drafting, which has stood the test of time.

The Government Annuities Act, founded on the report of a Select Committee, dealt with details of a somewhat intricate character. It authorized the present system of payment of annuities and life insurances through the Post-Office Savings Banks.

The Telegraph Acts of 1885 and 1892 were important measures, the former legalizing sixpenny telegrams, and providing for the protection of submarine cables, and the latter placing the telephone system of the country on a new basis.

Eight purely postal Acts sanctioned the acquisition of sites (including Coldbath Fields Prison), effected important alterations of parcel rates of postage, and controlled the conveyance of mails by more particu-

larly defining the authority, regulations, and rights of the Postmaster-General with regard to ship-letters, and by giving a new jurisdiction to the Railway Commissioners in disputes concerning payment for the conveyance of mails.

It may be mentioned in passing that there are several Savings Bank Acts, but that (56 and 57 Vict., cap. 69) of 1893 has, according to the testimony of the Postmaster-General in the House of Commons on March 19, 1894, already borne excellent fruit. It enables depositors to increase the amount of their deposits and their purchases of Government stock to a higher statutory limit, and advantage has already been freely taken of this salutary provision.

The preparation of instructions for the Bills or the consideration of drafts for these twelve Acts of Parliament represents a large amount of intellectual labour, but has been only a part of the legislative business of the Solicitor's Office. All Bills affecting the Post-Office which the Postmaster-General introduced were prepared by the Treasury draughtsman on the instructions of the Solicitor of the Post-Office, and examined and revised at the various stages in consultation. The Solicitor, in these and in other similar cases, attended the House when the Bills were in Committee to give advice and aid in drafting any necessary amendments.

Private Bills and Bills introduced by other Government departments have to be examined, and the former watched in their course through Parliament,

lest provisions unacceptable to the Post-Office should be passed without alteration. Amendments and new clauses have to be prepared, and tendered to the agents for the Bill.

Again, of late years—that is, since the appointment of the present Solicitor—departmental committees have made large drafts on his time. I recall several, having been concerned in some of them myself: viz., the Post-Office Rates Committee, which advised modifications of the parcels tariff, a reduction of the high rates of postage on letters above 12 ounces in weight, and the abolition of the charge for the redirection of inland letters; the Express Delivery Service Committee; committees on insurance, registration, etc.; the Monopoly Infringement Committee; one on postal bonds, another on the security of postal orders, and so on.

While this heavy work goes on, arbitrations, framing Treasury warrants, consolidating postal and savings bank law, and other matters, fill up every chink of what by a pleasantry may be termed the Solicitor's leisure, *i.e.*, the time left unabsorbed by the current demands of a great branch of the Post-Office.

To the lay mind, an arbitration seems to afford the greatest scope for tactical and legal skill, inasmuch as the notice of an opponent's claim is very far from disclosing the points of law or the material facts on which he intends to rely; and readiness of resource in setting up rebutting proof is a main element of successful resistance. There have been many such

cases in postal experience, in acquiring sites, in buying up telegraph interests, and in arranging terms with various corporations.

It may be that, on the whole, justice is secured by arbitration. But in some cases this is very far from the fact. Human judgment being fallible, the award of one man—for the umpire is autocratic where the arbitrators differ—must at times be open to comment.

Before Sir Robert's time, a company whose capital was only £150,000 received in compensation, under an award made by an eminent judge, after a protracted and hard-fought arbitration, £726,000. Yet, there is another side to the picture. Early in the seventies, claims which amounted in the aggregate to £3,312,927 were, to the best of my recollection, settled, some by arbitration and some by agreement, for little more than a twentieth part of that sum, viz., £176,299 11s. 9d. In this important matter the late Mr. E. Graves, though an engineer and not a solicitor, rendered good service. The claims under the Post-Office Sites Act of 1885, the burden of the settlement of which fell on the Solicitor, were reduced to the extent of little short of a quarter of a million pounds.

As a rule, arbitrations, from the official point of view, are thankless enterprises, leaving nothing behind them but a big bill and an infinity of worry and trouble. The abiding-place of the law officers of the department is not always a bed of roses.



PART III.

CHAPTER XI.—SCHEMES.

CHAPTER XII.—FATHERS IN TELEGRAPHY.



CHAPTER XI.

SCHEMES.

FOR several months in the year 1855, my work at St. Martin's-le-Grand lay in the General Correspondence Branch, under its talented and experienced chief, Mr. George Hardy ; but the end of the year found me in the Home Mails Branch, where, having some small knowledge of the railway system, my services, Sir Rowland thought, might be useful. There, sitting alone in a small room, with nothing particular before me, the old familiar subjects—telegraphs and railways—came back into my mind. The circulation map of the Post-Office forced upon me a picture of the wonderful ramifications of the department, of the numerous agencies which it possessed throughout the kingdom, of the ease with which it exercised supervision and control, and of its readily-adaptable machinery for a postal telegraph system.

And so the idea of telegraphs within the Post-Office grew up, and in 1856 it occurred to me to draw out, and, with the permission of the Duke of

Argyll, K.G., then Postmaster-General, to present to the Lords of the Treasury a letter of proposals.

It was not alone the aptness of the Post-Office for undertaking telegraphy which struck me, but also the simplicity and convenience of its uniform rates of charge. The telegraph companies, after a brief period of active competition and a lowered tariff, had combined and raised their charges ; and although telegrams no longer cost the fabulous sums which were levied upon them in 1851, yet the expense of telegraphing was still high.

Twenty words from London to Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Hull, or Newcastle, cost 4s., and to Dublin 5s. Into only a few towns and villages had the telegraph been carried. Where there was a wire, it as a rule stopped short at the railway-station. Here was a tariff to be reformed, a system to be enlarged !

The main features of my scheme were :

(a) A Government system of electric telegraphs, with the privilege of exclusive transmission of public telegrams, similar to that enjoyed by the Post-Office in respect of letters ; in short, a monopoly.

(b) The incorporation of the proposed system with the Post-Office, and extension of the wires in the first instance to the post-office of every post-town in England, Wales, and Scotland.

(The communication with Ireland was separately referred to.)

(c) The adoption of a uniform charge of 6d. for each message of twenty words between any two post-

towns, inclusive of delivery within the limits of the terminal town.

Except at eighty towns, which to some extent communicated by wires expressly set apart for public business, private messages had always to run the gauntlet of delays on wires provided for the business and regulation of railway traffic. Here was a radical fault to correct.

At some railway-stations it was next to impossible for a distant office to gain attention, except at train-times—not always then. Cases, indeed, occur to me in which it was not unusual for the clerk at a telegraph company's station to send word by train to a neighbouring railway-station that a message was waiting.

Railway messages, as was proper, had, to a large extent, priority, and delays of half an hour, or even an hour, to private telegrams were, on wires used for both purposes, the rule rather than the exception. Even over the so-called commercial wires, messages lingered. Rapid intercourse with Stock Exchanges and towns on special circuits was the only approach to that instantaneous communication to all parts of the kingdom with the promise of which public telegraphy originally started. Here were blots to efface! Indispensable, in my judgment, was the separation of the two services, public and railway, as also the speed and cheapness which the Post-Office, with an admirable mastery of the true principles of telegraphy, has since realized.

Under the plan proposed it was claimed—as, indeed, was obvious from the facts adduced—that :

(1) The Government departments would be placed in possession of a reliable means of instantaneous communication with all the out-ports and inland towns, as well as with the dock-yards and arsenals of Portsmouth, Plymouth, Pembroke, Sheerness, Woolwich, Chatham, etc., and that the same advantage would be afforded to the public at a reasonable charge.

(2) Central telegraph offices would be opened at 470 post-towns which previously had no telegraphic communication whatever; and at 210 post-towns there would be central Post-Office telegraphs instead of railway-station telegraphs; so that a total of 780 post-towns in Great Britain would have central telegraph offices; and there was to be eventually an extension of the wires to a part of the 8,000 or 9,000 sub-post-offices, if not to all.

(3) Remote districts of Great Britain would be brought into immediate communication with the centres of commerce; their trade would be facilitated, and their progress assisted.

(4) A complete separation of the railway telegraphic service from that of the public, which was strongly advocated, would tend to the safety of passengers travelling by railway, and the rapid transmission of public despatches.

(5) The consolidation of the system under one management would, it was clear, remove the liability to error resulting from the repetition of despatches at the termini of distinct telegraph companies' lines.

(6) Lastly, a progressive accession to the net public revenue, rising from a minimum of upwards of £50,000 a year, could be, not without reason, anticipated.

If these were merely the fanciful ideas of a young man of twenty-four, which had little to recommend them, and which eventually came to nothing, there would be small warrant for reproducing them here. But all which was planned out in 1856 has come to

pass—all, that is, except the net revenue; but, then, mine was a scheme for spending not more than a million and a quarter on postal telegraphs, whereas, thanks mainly to hesitation in adopting some such plan, about £11,000,000 have been laid out.

In the early part of 1857 a copy of the letter sent to the Treasury was furnished to the late Lord Stanley of Alderley—who was known to be in favour of telegraphs worked by the Post-Office—and to Lord Stanley, the late Earl of Derby. The idea of Post-Office telegraphs had been in Lord Stanley of Alderley's mind (as, indeed, his lordship's letter shows) long before my paper reached him, though Mr. Scudamore in his printed reports, generously desirous of giving me all possible credit, has expressed the contrary opinion.

The letter of Lord Stanley of Alderley ran as follows:

‘Dover Street,

‘March 8, 1857.

‘SIR,

‘I am much obliged to you for your letter and the copy of your scheme for establishing a complete system of electric telegraph communication in England in connection with the Post-Office. This has long been the view which I have taken of the subject.

‘The expense would have been small, and the facilities afforded by a department of the executive like the Post-Office for carrying it into effect would have been very great.

‘Even now, according to your statement, the value of all the shares of the different telegraphs in England is under £1,000,000.

‘To make the plan complete, the value of the submarine lines to Ireland, and, in my opinion, to the Continent also, should be added. I have no means at hand of ascertaining what the value of these lines is, and if you possess the information I should be glad to have it.

‘If properly worked, I am inclined to think these telegraphic communications could be worked by the Post-Office not only without expense to the country, but with a profit.

‘At the same time, the security and regularity of the communications would be greater, and the benefits much more widely extended, than could be attained under any private companies. There are also many other arguments in favour of the plan, particularly in connection with foreign lines.

‘I am, your obedient servant,

‘STANLEY OF ALDERLEY.’

The letter of Lord Stanley, M.P. (afterwards Earl of Derby), was couched in these terms :

‘St. James’s Square,

‘February 3, 1857.

‘SIR,

‘I have pleasure in acknowledging the letter and plan received from you yesterday.

‘ Whether your scheme be practicable would require a longer consideration to decide. It is certainly large, original, and recommended by the analogy of the Post-Office. I shall keep the paper and consult others upon it.

‘ Your obedient servant,

‘ STANLEY.’

It was a long time before anything came of the scheme. Mr. James Wilson, M.P., Financial Secretary of the Treasury, had, no doubt, his hands full of other matters. Sir Rowland Hill was still actively engaged in completing his plans of Postal Reform, and a junior clerk in the Post-Office had no means of ascertaining how his proposals were viewed at Whitehall, nor, without offence to the superiors, of combating objections or overcoming prejudice. Eventually, however, my plan became public, being printed as part of a Parliamentary Paper (House of Commons, No. 202) on April 3, 1868, just twelve years after it had been launched.

It is a satisfaction to me to repeat that every part of the scheme of 1856—central offices, separation of wires, free delivery within a mile or so, a legal monopoly, and a sixpenny rate—is now in full operation.

Telegraphy is too attractive to those who have once been associated with it to be wholly put aside, even when their professional duties lie another way; and while awaiting the upshot of the letter to the

Treasury, two or three other plans engaged my attention.

One was a scheme of ocean telegraphy, which contemplated the laying of a cable from England to the Canary Islands, across the South Atlantic to Barbadoes, and so along the chain of West India Islands. Something of the kind was ultimately carried out, an extension to Brazil being also effected.

Another scheme had also in view an oceanic system of telegraphy, the cable of which, following the first-named line to the Canary Islands, was to go south, *via* Ascension and St. Helena, to the Cape of Good Hope, then onwards to the island of St. Paul in the South Seas, next to another very southerly point (Kerguelen Island), and so to Port Philip Heads in the colony of Victoria, and Australia generally. The cable to Australia was laid many years later, but by the route of the Red Sea and the South Indian Ocean.

The course advocated no doubt had its drawbacks in the vast length of the several spans, but once down, no harm could have come to it on the Australian side of the Cape. James Anthony Froude might then have written from Australasia in 1885 in other terms than these :

‘The answer from Lord Derby (then Secretary of State for the Colonies) had been delayed. Something was said to be wrong with the telegraph on the

Persian frontier. Strange to think that communication between London and an island at the Antipodes should be carried on through ancient Parthia and across the rivers of Ecbatana and Babylon !'

As it struck Mr. Froude in 1885, so, thirty years earlier, in 1856, had it appeared strange to me that a British colonial telegraph should have to cross foreign territory. A sea route, avoiding foreign frontiers, seemed to be the only safe line for a great colonial cable to take. There are, it is true, rollers off Ascension and St. Helena which might have been hurtful to a cable, but special observation would soon have shown how any risk of breakage from this cause could best be met.

Had the wire been laid only as far as the Cape, the public would not have read in the newspapers that at a public dinner in London on April 23, 1888, the late Earl of Derby, formerly Foreign Secretary, and at a later date Secretary of State for the Colonies, said :

'Then came the cable to South Africa, which, if brought about a few years earlier, would have been the means of saving a great deal in lives and money.'

Again, a system of telegraphs within the colony of the Cape of Good Hope, which would have been of great service in the early development and consolidation of that important dependency, was a need to which it occurred to me, but without success, to draw the attention of the Colonial Office. Two of my



younger brother officers who had worked with me at the General Post-Office have been in past years engaged—one, indeed, is so at this moment—in carrying out inland telegraphs, not merely within, but far beyond, the limits contemplated by me thirty-five years ago.

There was yet a shot in the locker. On September 14, 1858, the *Times* contained a letter from me unfolding what that journal was pleased to term 'A Gigantic Scheme.' The letter, which gave the figures as well as an outline of the plan, contemplated the erection of a line of telegraph across the North American continent from Montreal and Toronto to British Columbia and Vancouver's Island, which should prove the forerunner of the Canadian Pacific Railway, and the means, in part, of opening up the vast unoccupied territory on the Canadian side of the Rocky Mountains.

My idea was to commence the erection of the telegraph at Fort William at the western end of Lake Superior, and about 500 miles from Owen Sound at the eastern end. From Fort William to what is now Winnipeg (formerly Fort Garry), with the exception of short occasional portages, the water communication was continuous, and seemed to admit of the transport, by canoes or barges of very shallow draught, of the necessary stores.

From Winnipeg, my plan was to carry the wire across the prairies, and through the Punch-bowl Pass of the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific coast and Van-

couver's Island. One of my suggested routes, which has since been adopted by the Canadian Pacific Railway, followed a south-westerly direction, taking the Assiniboine River in its course. It struck the lower or South Saskatchewan River at or near Chesterfield House.

The stores for the West were to be shipped, *via* Hudson's Bay, to York Factory in the north, conveyed in barges during the summer-time up the Nelson River to Lake Winnipeg, and from Lake Winnipeg, along the North Saskatchewan as far as Edmonton. In the choice of a route, the fact influenced me that the district of the Saskatchewan had been reported by a Select Committee of the House of Commons to be among those areas most likely to be desired for early settlement.

What were trackless prairies tenanted only by the buffalo, and known only to the hunter and the Indian at the date of my letter, are now for the most part dotted with villages, even towns, traversed by a main trunk railway 3,000 miles long, and capable of yielding wheat enough to feed a hemisphere.

Here was a land of promise which needed only communication of some sort with the outer world to open it up.

The distances are enormous. From Montreal to Fort William is 998 miles; and this is only the beginning. From Fort William to Winnipeg is 426 miles; across the prairies to Donald, on the confines of the Selkirk and Rocky Mountain ranges, is 1,024

miles. Across the Great Divide to the town of Vancouver on the Pacific coast is a distance of 459 miles more. This is the magnificent territory which it was my aim to connect with Montreal by the telegraph wire, and which Englishmen at last are beginning to overrun. Here is the cradle of a noble empire. Would that mine had been the hand to assist in founding it!

As Sir John Pender, K.C.M.G., expressed himself at a public dinner thirty years later—viz., on April 23, 1888—so it seemed to me in September, 1858, that ‘emigration would be quickened and sweetened by the knowledge that the cable and this extension would keep those who went out in touch with the old homes and their surroundings.’

However, to my narrative. Although not in order of date, as it did not originate with me until twenty-three years later, there may be mentioned another scheme which was of deep interest to me personally, and which only came to fruition after a further interval of fourteen years. My proposals had for their object a system of coast communications; in other words, the establishment of telegraphic communication, to be overlooked by the Post-Office, but worked by the coastguard, around the sea-board of the British Isles.

When the most recent war between Russia and Turkey broke out, and when, in the spring of 1878, the political relations of this country with Russia became matter of public comment, it seemed to me,

as Surveyor-General for telegraph business, important to prepare a scheme for girdling the British Isles with a coast telegraph, which should be equally available for defensive purposes during war, and for summoning help at any time in case of shipwreck. I had seen the necessity of something of the sort when, standing one stormy day near the Highcliff Mansions Hotel at Bournemouth, on the high ground which overlooks the great bay, two small vessels met my eye as they came out of Poole Harbour in the teeth of the gale. One, unhappily, was lost in the offing; the other eventually came ashore under the cliff at my feet. After unavoidable delay, the lifeboat and rocket apparatus came up from Poole, and the crew were rescued. The vessel grounded on an ebbing tide; had she done so on the flood, all hands must have perished before the means of rescue arrived.

This incident gave rise in my mind to the belief that connecting telegraphically all the coastguard stations with the post-offices would not only be a defensive measure, but would increase the usefulness of the coastguard in the direction of saving life and property. My idea was to dovetail a local telegraph system, following the coastguard path, into the Post-Office system, as well as to provide for direct communication between the signal-stations themselves. Thus would be served the double purpose of sounding the alarm in war-time and summoning help in case of shipwreck. I submitted my plan in April, 1878, but difficulties stood in the way.



However, not discouraged by want of success, and confident that some such plan must sooner or later be carried out, the proposal was renewed in 1881, and again in 1888, when, soon after a change of Government, it seemed proper to seek from the Postmaster-General (the late Mr. H. C. Raikes) permission to address the Prime Minister, which was given in the following terms :

‘I have carefully considered Mr. Baines’ very valuable suggestions, and shall be very glad to sanction his addressing Lord Salisbury as he proposes.

‘H. C. R.’

My letter went forward, and was referred to the Admiralty. By good luck the Board of Trade had a committee sitting on the subject of coast communications, to which the plan was communicated. Meanwhile Sir John Burns, Bart., of Glasgow, had thrown his powerful and friendly influence into the scale. Memorials went up to Parliament at his suggestion from shipping bodies, and letters from his pen appeared in the journals of the day. Sir John, in writing to the *Times* on December 31, 1888, urged that ‘at a time when coast defences are being seriously considered by the Government and the public, it may be well to supplement the larger measures for national protection by carrying around the British Isles a line of telegraph following the coastguard path, and dovetailed at suitable points with the postal telegraph system. This suggestion owes its origin to Mr. F.

E. Baines, one of the Assistant-Secretaries to the Post-Office, whose proposal is to girdle Great Britain and Ireland with a line of telegraph so arranged that it may be utilized as occasion requires from station to station, and cut and worked by the coastguard patrol itself at any point and at any moment. It might seem at first sight an expensive and difficult matter. It is really simple and inexpensive. Such a telegraph would only cost £30, or at most £40, a mile.' So from London, right round the south of England, taking the coastguard path for 1,000 miles, the cost was not likely greatly to exceed £30,000.

My colleague, Mr. Maberley, of the surveying branch (a nephew, it is understood, of the old Colonel), also promulgated a scheme, based on his intimate knowledge of the coasts of Devon and Cornwall. An active and capable member of the Plymouth Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Robert Bayly, having visited Denmark, and seen such a system actually in operation, put the chamber at Plymouth in motion, and, securing the co-operation of Sir E. Birkbeck, M.P., and other members of Parliament, carried the press (including Mr. *Punch*) and many chambers of commerce with him, and by that means, in 1892, succeeded in inducing the Government to favour the plan, and obtain a grant of public money. A large mileage of wire has now been erected on the coast.

'It is not everybody,' wrote a high official at the

Treasury in a private letter to me on this subject on June 18, 1892, 'that lives to see his ideal realized.' Already in January, 1893, the work, according to the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, had begun to bear fruit.

An act of true gallantry remains in my recollection. A line had been carried from the shore at Bournemouth to the mariners in distress on the vessel which came ashore, and one of two men on board was being drawn by means of it to land, when the slack became fast on board the wreck. Without hesitation the man remaining drew his jack-knife and cut the line in two, thus ensuring his comrade's safety and leaving himself in peril. Happily, the lifeboat at length hove in sight and took him off.

It was in Mr. Fawcett's time that the telephone came under public notice. Most people saw from the first that this wonderful instrument, despite imperfections, had a great future before it. Private companies were formed to work the telephone patents at a commercial profit; but the Post-Office fought shy of the newcomer. It had yet to win a reputation and become indispensable.

Soon the business of the telephone companies began to threaten the pocket of the telegraph service proper, and the department took up arms in defence of its rights. A court of law decided that the telephone was within the legal monopoly of the Postmaster-General, as defined by the Act of 1869; so there was an end to the independent action of the

companies. Here, then, was the department's opportunity.

Under the fostering care of Mr. A. W. Heaviside, the telegraph engineer in Newcastle, and the late Mr. Nind, postmaster, the public on Tyneside were beginning to take an interest in local telegraph exchanges. The telephone seemed exactly fitted for such work; its use could be pushed far and wide.

At that time the mail-office, and not the telegraph branch, concerned me; yet the expediency of the Post-Office striking out a line of its own, and building up a great system of telephones for the public, impressed me so strongly as to induce me to put before Mr. Fawcett a scheme to that end—to which, my indistinct recollection is, he was at first inclined to lean.

But the reluctance—whether at the Post-Office or the Treasury Chambers—to spend large capital sums on telephonic extension, and thus increase the outlay involved in the purchase of the telegraphs; to interfere with what promised to be active and effective private enterprise, and to take a leap into a dusky future, was too great to be overcome. The occasion passed by, and the private companies were allowed to proceed under Post-Office licenses, and the result is a matter of history.

Probably a civil servant has no right to be grieved at a policy which happens to be opposed to his own views; yet, looking back, there seems to be no doubt that a golden opportunity was lost of benefiting at

one stroke the public and the postal revenue. Loss of the latter, however galling to the postal servant, was of no real importance to the State if the public at large gained in another way at least as much as was lost; but in this case there were to be lamented both loss of public revenue and a restricted development of telephonic resources. That is so still. The field yet open for a profitable use of the telephone is almost unlimited, and, in my opinion, the Post-Office alone has the potentiality of pushing such use to the uttermost.

My wish had been for the department to commence active telephony in London by laying down telephones for postal and private employment; and, doing the same in the large towns as funds became available, to bring the apparatus, at a moderate rental, within reach of the general public. If every house rated at not less than say £50 a year were connected with a proper local exchange, the doctor and chemist, the baker, the butcher and fishmonger, the grocer, the police, nay, every professional or trading person in the Metropolis, as well as the cab-stand and the theatre, would be within hail of the parlour, the hall, the snuggerly, or the kitchen. Such telephones would have become fruitful feeders of the postal telegraph system in rural districts, because the same wire which brought the professional man or others within call would connect the telegraph-office in the town with the house in the country.

But it was not to be, although the Post-Office had

the law on its side, and machinery available for engrafting the use of the telephone on national habits. How far recent legislation will correct the timidity of the past and redress what strike me as errors; how far rural as well as urban parts will be cheaply furnished with this powerful auxiliary to domestic comfort and commercial progress, time will show.

CHAPTER XII.

FATHERS IN TELEGRAPHY.

WHILE circumstances favourable to the assumption by the State of the control of the telegraphs are slowly shaping themselves, let us pause to bestow a thought on those pioneers of electro-telegraphy to whom this country—perhaps the world—owes more than it has yet seen fit to acknowledge.

As the name of the late Professor Morse, who died in 1872, is imperishably associated with the birth and growth of the electric telegraph in the United States of America, so in this country the names of Sir W. F. Cooke and Sir Charles Wheatstone, in like connection, ought never to be forgotten. They were not, however, the only inventors of electric telegraphs. Ronalds, Highton, Brett, Little, and others, were amongst the pioneers. But they were the first to patent, about 1836, an electrical telegraph which should be feasible, simple, and commercially profitable.

The single-needle form of telegraph which Cooke and Wheatstone devised remains to this day in

extensive use, and almost in its original shape. The earlier forms, exhibiting two, three, and even five, needles on the dial-plate, have long since become obsolete. The 'double-needle' was in its day, *i.e.*, from 1846 to 1856, or even later, a very good apparatus. It laid the foundation of telegraphy in England. But after 1856 it was almost entirely superseded by a form of the Morse printing telegraph, which again in later days has given place to the 'sounder.' In years to come the telephone may relegate even these effective devices to the limbo of the museum.

The very earliest forms of needle instrument could be worked at no greater pace (with two needles) than eight words a minute, and that, too, only over a distance of 40 or 50 miles. When the day came for discarding the double-needle telegraph, it had been, thanks to lighter needles and better insulation of line-wires, worked up to 40 or more words a minute, even to a distance of 200 miles. But the 'transmitter' and 'receiver' of Wheatstone, which were the production of the later years of the Professor's life, and which, discarding the needle altogether, imprinted in black ink on the white or blue paper strip at great speed the dots and dashes of the Morse system, altogether eclipsed hand-worked machines.

These valuable contrivances, the main feature of which was taken from the Jacquard loom, were a great advance in telegraphy. They doubled or trebled the transmitting capacity of a wire. In the last

twenty years, so many improvements have been effected by the staff of the Post-Office that despatches are now conveyed at the rate of 400 or 500 words a minute, over a distance (*e.g.*, from London to Dublin *via* Wexford) of more than 400 miles.

A common rate of working through the Wheatstone 'transmitter' is 150 words a minute between London and Edinburgh, one wire only being used, instead of the two wires which were required by the double-needle apparatus. Under favourable circumstances, the rate of working can be doubled. By the 'duplex' contrivance of Gintt, of Vienna, as improved by Stearns, of Boston, Massachusetts, the wire can be worked simultaneously in both directions, so that the figures must again be doubled to show its present carrying power. There are now multiplex systems, by which means the capacity of transmitting several messages in the same direction, or in opposite directions, at the same time, on the same wire, are multiplied.

Looking back fifty years, we see two wires working at the rate of 8 words a minute, or an average of 4 words per wire per minute, over relatively short distances. Now there is a potentiality of 400 words, nay, even 600 or 700 words, per wire per minute, over very long distances. As the invention of duplex working has been supplemented by the contrivances for multiplex working just referred to (one wire sufficing to connect several separate offices in one part of the country with one or more offices in another part) it

is almost impossible to put a limit to the carrying capacity of a single wire.

The late Mr. Stearns, who visited this country in 1873, was a thoughtful and agreeable man. One of our guests at the *conversazione* held three years after the transfer of the telegraphs, at the opening of the new Post-Office, was observed to be studying attentively a model of the new electrical contrivance, styled 'Duplex.'

We were rather proud of our work, believing that if ever a triumph of science had been made clear by a model, our demonstration stood in the front rank. The guest, however, appeared to be very much puzzled.

'What, sir,' inquired he of one of the officials, 'does that remarkable and interesting apparatus represent? I cannot make it out.'

'No wonder,' was the reply; 'that is a real novelty. It is a model of a new duplex telegraph arrangement invented by an American named Stearns.'

'Ah, indeed!' said he, with an amused air and a slightly Western accent; 'many thanks. My name is Stearns.' *Tableau.*

Sir William Fothergill Cooke (he was knighted, and Wheatstone, too, for the brilliant services which they both rendered in the cause of telegraphy) was above the middle height, and of gentle manners. He was not a rich man; it was said that he sustained pecuniary losses in connection with the *Great Eastern*

steamship, and he died when many years of honourable repose seemed to be before him.

Professor Wheatstone was full of restless energy, and overflowed with information. He had great mechanical aptitude, and was a genius. While Cooke possessed extensive electrical knowledge, Wheatstone had a special faculty of adapting it. He explained, in my hearing, with great animation, before a Committee of the House of Commons, in 1868, his cryptogram, or contrivance for readily producing a secret code. The reporters had no easy task in keeping up with his rapid and copious utterance. Wheatstone, Edwin Chadwick, Arnott, Lyon Playfair, Henry Cole, and Rowland and Frederic Hill, were all members of a private scientific society originated by Sir John Shaw Lefevre, K.C.B.

Sir Charles Wheatstone, who was born in 1802, died in the winter of 1875 in Paris, whither he had gone on business connected with French telegraphy.

More than a passing word is due to the early experiments of Sir Francis Ronalds in the direction of electrical telegraphy. He was at work as early as 1816, two years—or five, as Ronalds puts it—before Oersted's great discovery of the effect of galvanic currents on the magnetic needle. He published the results of his investigations in pamphlet form in 1823, and brought out a new edition in 1871, the year after the Post-Office had taken over the telegraphs. The long interval had in no way damped his energies.

Ronalds' plan was highly ingenious—in fact, most meritorious, and the production of a true pioneer; but it was in no degree likely to be commercially profitable, nor did he succeed in carrying it beyond the experimental stage.

He relied on static electricity, which is of a far more erratic, and far less manageable, quality than the product of the galvanic trough. By means of it pith balls, depending by filaments of silk from a peg, were at pleasure to be made (as they can easily be made) to fly apart, and thus produce an inverted V—so, Λ . The conducting wires, insulated in a glass tube, were to be buried 6 feet deep in a wooden trough, or iron pipe, in the middle of the high-road, and there were to be 'proving' stations, or what would now be called testing boxes, 5 miles apart.

There is a choice anecdote to be related in this connection. The line was to be permanently charged; so the pith-balls, in the normal state, would hang apart. But when the 'universal electrophorus' failed to electrify they would fall together. Recourse was then to be had to the proving stations, the fault searched for, and the defective length made sound. So far good! If rogues opened his trenches they would swiftly be detected, according to our inventor. If 'mischievous devils' from the cellars of houses assailed his wires, 'condemn the houses,' says Sir Francis stoutly.

And as for his 'proving stations,' thus writes my author :

'Any sorry little twopenny post *cove* might take a canter on his Rozinantuolo, and, on his arrival at a prover, perform the operation on it in less time than I have employed to describe the manner of its performance.'

'A sorry little twopenny post cove,' indeed! Really, Sir Francis, even after the lapse of seventy years, you must excuse me, but such language——

It was he who, being desirous of submitting his invention to the Admiralty in Lord Melville's time, met with a rebuff, not, indeed, from his lordship, who was all politeness, but from another.

'Lord Melville was obliging enough,' writes Sir Francis, 'in reply to my application to him, to request Mr. Hay to *see me on the subject of my discovery*; but before the nature of it had been yet known except to the late Lord Henniker, Dr. Rees, Mr. Brande, and a few friends, I received an intimation from Mr. Barrow to the effect "that telegraphs of any kind were then wholly unnecessary, and that no other than the one then in use would be adopted." I felt very little disappointment, and not a shadow of resentment on the occasion, because everyone knows that telegraphs have long been great bores at the Admiralty. Should they again become necessary, however, perhaps electricians may be indulged by his lordship and Mr. Barrow with an opportunity of proving what they are capable of in this way. I claim no indulgence for mere chimeras and chimera-framers, and I hope to escape the fate of being ranked in that unenviable class.'

Mr. Hay was probably Lord Melville's private secretary and a relation of my late friend, Mr. E. H. Hay, of the Admiralty; while Mr. Barrow was beyond doubt Mr. (afterwards Sir) John Barrow, who at the

suggestion of Canning in 1809 helped John Murray with the *Quarterly Review*.*

It is only fair to own that even if the Admiralty had taken up Ronalds' plan, failure must have come of it, if only on account of the difficulties of insulation. Like the atmospheric principle as applied to railways, it was rather pretty in theory, but not to be depended on for a day in actual operation.

I have had by me for forty-four years 'Electric Telegraph Manipulation,' by Charles V. Walker, formerly Superintendent of Telegraphs to the South-Eastern Railway Company. It is an interesting relic of the past. Mr. Walker was a man of good scientific knowledge and experience, painstaking to a fault, and as modest and unassuming as he was kindly and upright. Nineteen years after first reading Mr. Walker's book it became my duty to prepare the instructions under which he surveyed for the Post-Office the property of the principal telegraph companies then about to be purchased.

To him, in my opinion, should be ascribed the credit of being amongst the first to bring scientific training to bear on the solution of the grave problems which the electric telegraph in its early days undoubtedly presented. His range, however, was limited. The longest circuit which he controlled—viz., from London to Dover—did not cover much more than

* Memoir of John Murray, by Smiles. John Murray, London, 1891.

80 miles, and he had, therefore, to battle with few of the trying experiences of early telegraphists working under the Electric Telegraph Company. Still, it was a scientific mind which came in contact with workaday experience, and which began to teach the lessons of telegraphy.

At that time, because of electrical leakage, a message which now, in any state of the barometer, is sent direct, and without repetition, might have to be repeated, in rainy weather, eight or ten times between London and Glasgow, so little understood was the art of insulation. In the finest weather, 200 miles was the maximum length of circuit workable direct; and even for as much to be attained, all circumstances had need to be highly favourable.

Now, in our superior wisdom, we can afford to smile at the artless views of the Superintendent of Telegraphs in 1850 regarding the especial importance of Tonbridge, a station about 90 miles from London, in relation to telegraphy in the counties of Kent and Sussex :

‘ By reference to the plan,’ writes Mr. Walker, ‘ the commanding position of this station may be seen. It is midway between the capital and the coast, and in a central position in regard to the rest of the district. Here the conduct and management of the telegraph department is carried on. We have here our staff for maintaining the integrity of the line work, for cleaning and repairing the apparatus, and for keeping

all stations supplied with battery power ; and here we keep our stores. We befriend and assist all stations, and are their prime resource in times of distress and difficulty, helping on their messages when their own powers are crippled, and under all circumstances securing the successful working of the line.'

The charges for telegrams were then very much higher than in 1856. The cost of telegraphing twenty words from London to Manchester, Leeds, Hull, or Liverpool was 8s. or 9s. ; to Newcastle, 10s. ; to Glasgow, 14s. In almost every case another shilling was charged for portorage. The tariff of the South-Eastern Railway Company (which had an independent system of its own, under Mr. Walker's superintendence) was higher still. The charge of the former company to Rugby was 4s. 6d. ; of the latter to Dover (about the same distance), 11s.

But it did not occur to Mr. Walker that there was anything irrational in these exalted prices, or any sound reason for reducing them. He was quite of the contrary opinion, and not at all 'disposed to think that any such reduction as could prudently be made in these rates would produce an adequate increase of telegraph business.'

Ah, my master ! all the telegrams of the United Kingdom under your cherished rates were fewer than 250,000 in a year ; under the 6d. rate, which I did my best to advocate just six years after reading your book, there are now more than 70,000,000 public

telegrams in a year, besides uncounted millions passing through the telephone.

‘It would not be easy,’ continued Mr. Walker, ‘to reduce our rates so low as to rival the Post-Office, and obtain a large increase of business, nor do I think such a state of things is to be coveted. For our character would then be at stake; everybody would have to wait till somebody else’s message was sent, and the telegraph, instead of being for the most part ready at a moment’s notice, or with no great delay to all comers, would be always found occupied, and messages would be retained so long before their turn arrived to be sent, that the true essence of the telegraph would be to all intents and purposes lost.’

He reckoned without the Post-office. But these being Mr. Walker’s views, no wonder he is somewhat enthusiastic over what he deems to be the moderate cost of telegrams under the following circumstances :

‘To one who sees a telegraph in operation for the first time, the effect borders on the marvellous. Setting out of the question the fact that the needles are caused to move by an individual perhaps 100 miles off; the rare occurrence of the clerk pointing to +, implying he did *not understand*; and, finally, the quiet manner with which the clerk tells you very coolly, as the result of his operations, that “the very pretty girl with bright blue eyes and long curls *has* sailed for Boulogne in the *Princess Clementine*, now

leaving Folkestone Harbour; and that she *is* accompanied by the tall, handsome man with the dark moustache and military cloak"—as he tells you this, and says: "Message and answer, forty words, two rates at 10s. 6d., £1 1s., portorage 1s.—£1 2s." if you happen to be papa of the pair of blue eyes you are bewildered, and wish you were an electric current, and could be sent after them.'

Mr. Walker was one of the gentlest and most amiable of men, and this, no doubt, is the way in which he would himself, in the paternal relationship, have regarded the goings on of 'blue eyes.' But most men in the position of 'papa of the pair of blue eyes' would not be contented with bewilderment on seeing the bill, but would possibly express themselves on the subject in terms of unaccustomed strength.

The cost of this interesting inquiry and reply would now, under the uniform 6d. rate, be 1s. 8d., instead of £1 2s.

Like Sir Charles Todd, the Postmaster-General of South Adelaide, Walker in Kent was an astronomer as well as an electrician and a telegraphist. He was one of the first to originate the submarine telegraph.

If his fruitful work is now forgotten, and he himself has gone down unrewarded to the grave, let his own words of 1850 speak again for him:

'The first step has been taken, the first stage has been passed. Signals from London have been transmitted to the coast at Folkestone, and onward by two

miles of covered wire submerged beneath the waters to the deck of a vessel afloat, and conversation has so been held. This was on January 10, 1849; and as the day will assuredly come, but not just now, when this embryo invasion of Neptune's domain shall become a practical reality, it may be well to have a faithful record of the circumstances connected with this experiment.'

Before Walker cast his wire into the waters of the English Channel, Sömmering, according to Wünschendorff's '*Traité de Télégraphie sous-marine*,' had succeeded at St. Petersburg, in 1807-8, in igniting gunpowder at a distance by electricity sent through a wire. In 1815 he did so at Paris, using a wire laid in the Seine.

But nothing, so far as is known, came of this experiment for nearly a quarter of a century, when Dr. O'Shaughnessy, an officer of the medical branch of the East India Company, and eminent amongst the telegraphists of India, sent a galvanic current through a wire covered with pitch and tarred hemp which he had laid across a bend of the river Hooghly.

In 1842 Professor Morse submerged a wire in New York Harbour, and sent a galvanic current through it; and in 1844 Wheatstone exchanged signals between a boat and a lighthouse in the waters off Cardiff, across which Mr. Preece, a year or two ago, signalled messages electrically without sea-wires.

In 1845 Ezra Cornell carried through a bold enterprise. He laid a cable twelve miles long in the river

Hudson. Indiarubber was his insulating material. Yet again, in 1846 Mr. West let down a wire coated with indiarubber in Portsmouth Harbour, and was able to telegraph to land; while in 1848 Armstrong, on the Hudson, and Dr. Werner Siemens, in Kiel Harbour, experimented with wires insulated with gutta-percha, a material then coming into use.

The establishment of telegraphic communication between England and France cannot, however, be directly traced to these important experiments. Wheatstone had had the matter in view for many years, certainly as far back as 1837. But it was reserved for Walker to bring matters to an issue. Being professionally engaged in telegraphy in Kent, he naturally looked forward to the day when Dover and Calais should be telegraphically united.

Let him further tell the stirring story of his venturesome essay in his own modest language:

‘I selected upwards of two miles of No. 16 copper wire, provided with its coat of gutta-percha. I personally tested the whole, piece by piece, under water, and also the several joints. It was then wound on a wooden drum, mounted on a frame, and so conveyed to Folkestone. I erected a pole in the sands just above high-water mark, by which I led a wire from the telegraph-office to the margin of the sea. On the evening of the 9th I, for the last time, tested the continuity of the wire by placing the drum on the sands and connecting the covered wire with the wire

that led from London; and then, with the ripple at our feet, and by the glare of lamps, amid a motley and wondering group of fishermen, seamen, revenue officers, and others, we proved the circuit was good by holding converse with the clerks at London.

‘Our plan for the morrow was to take the drum out in a small boat, somewhat in a direct line from the shore, uncoiling and submerging the wire as we went on, and there to have remained at anchor till the time of the arrival of the train from London, when the steamer was to sail out with our friends to the position shown on the right, and, having the telegraph apparatus on deck, was to take us on board with the end of the wire. But the aspect of nature changed during the night. The wind arose, and the sea became so disturbed that, instead of the ship going out to the boat, the latter went alone, paying out the wire in its progress, and returning with the end to the shore. It terminated at the instrument on the deck of the steamer moored alongside the pier. The conditions of the experiment were, therefore, all complied with, although the *effect was not so striking* as if the ship should have gone out to receive the end of the wire.

‘It had previously been arranged that the telegraph business for this day should be conducted on one wire (No. 2), leaving No. 1 at liberty for these experiments. The Folkestone end of this wire, as I have said, was joined to the submerged wire, the other end of which was also now connected with a single-needle instru-

ment on deck, and the circuit was completed by an earth-plate dropped overboard.

‘All being ready, I took the handle of the instrument and made the letter L, the call for London; the acknowledgment of the call was instantaneous, and at forty-nine minutes past noon the first telegraph despatch passed beneath the British Channel in direct course to London; it was, ‘Mr. Walker to Chairman,—I am on board the *Princess Clementine*; I am successful.’ Immediately upon this a correspondence was kept up with London.

This was the birth of ocean telegraphy. Walker had taken his wire out to sea and thrown it overboard. Then through 2 miles of wire in deep water and about 80 miles of land line he telegraphed an actual message to his chairman in London. The next year saw an exchange of messages by telegraph between the French and English coasts.

The Royal Astronomical Society were not slow to recognise Walker’s claims as a man of science. They elected him a Fellow of their learned body January 8, 1858, and when he died, their monthly notices for February, 1883, registered the sorrowful event, but I am aware of no other honour accorded to his memory.

A word of tribute must at least be paid to the great services rendered by Mr. Edwin Clark, of Britannia Tubular Bridge fame, in improving the earlier processes of telegraphy and in reducing the

cost of construction. He invented an insulator of great merit, and, in short, brought a trained and vigorous mind to bear on the problems of early telegraphy, to the great benefit of the struggling Electric Telegraph Company.

If not in the strictest sense of the term a pioneer, Sir James Anderson, like the public-spirited American, Mr. Cyrus Field, must nevertheless be classed amongst the fathers in telegraphy, his services in the department of submarine telegraphs having been great and varied.

He was a seaman for many years, commanding vessels of the British and North American Company, better known as the Cunard Line, up to 1865, when he was appointed to take charge of Brunel's *Great Eastern*, the ship that struck a blow at the fortunes of Cooke.

As a cable-laying ship the *Great Eastern* did wonders. But she was nearly wrecked in the process of launching; on her first voyage a steam jacket burst, off Brighton, a casualty attended with much loss of life; on another voyage her rudder was lost, and she lay helpless during a gale in the trough of the sea. In the end, after lying idle for years in Milford Haven, where she seemed to me as sound as when she was launched, this beautiful, magnificent vessel was broken up for the sake of the old iron of her hull.

In a conversation on the subject with Sir James

Anderson, he told me that he was of opinion that the cause of the failure of the *Great Eastern* as a mercantile venture lay not so much in the ship herself, as in the fact that she stood alone. To be commercially successful, he said, a large steamer must belong to a line—that is, be one of a set of similar vessels. Her burthen was 15,000 tons. The great vessels now afloat approach that tonnage, though they are still behind the *Great Eastern*. The magnificent *Campania*, of the Cunard Line, sent to sea in May, 1893, is within a shade of 13,000 tons.

As a landsman, no feat of seamanship strikes me as more remarkable and effective than one in which Captain Anderson and Captain Moriarty, of the Royal Navy, were jointly concerned. The former was in command of the *Great Eastern*; the latter assisted him in navigation. In 1865, when an early Atlantic telegraph was being laid from that vessel, the cable, at a distance of 1,050 miles from Ireland—that is, in mid-ocean—broke. Captain Moriarty fixed the exact latitude and longitude of the mishap. Next year the *Great Eastern* successfully laid a new cable (July 27, 1866), and that good work accomplished, harked back to fish up the old one. It lay where the water was more than two miles deep.

Without hesitation these brilliant seamen placed the *Great Eastern* over the cable of 1865, in longitude $36^{\circ} 7'$ west, and a grapnel was let down. Almost at the first haul they caught it, and brought it on board ship. The electricians cut it, applied a speaking

instrument to the sound length, and lo! after the silence of a year, the wire awoke to life—‘the long-speechless cable began to talk’*—and the Atlantic Telegraph Company’s office at Valentia, in Kerry, on the western coast of Ireland, spoke through the recovered wire to the *Great Eastern* in mid-ocean, 1,050 miles distant. A ray of light waving to and fro in a darkened cabin was the reward they had toiled for and secured.

After thus taking a principal part in successfully laying one Atlantic cable and recovering another, Captain Anderson and the late Mr. Charles Bright, the Atlantic Telegraph Company’s engineer, received the honour of knighthood in recognition of their share in these great works. Sir James then abandoned the sea as a profession, and gave himself up—not wholly, indeed, for he was identified with many a telegraphic enterprise—but mainly to the interests of the Direct Eastern Telegraph Company. He must have found in the chairman of that company, Sir John Pender, M.P., a congenial chief. Working hand-in-hand, chairman and managing director matured a vast system of cables between a little bay in Cornwall, Porthcurno by name, and the remotest settlements of the Eastern hemisphere.

Sir James was a writer on his favourite subject, submarine telegraphy; he was a member of learned societies, a thorough seaman, and a tall, broad-shouldered, ruddy-faced, capable man. The storms

* ‘The Electric Telegraph,’ Lardner and Bright, 1867.

of the Atlantic did but knit a vigorous frame together. Few men have led a more useful—none, it is safe to assume, a more active—life. When he died, in May, 1893, he had not yet attained the Scriptural term of ‘threescore years and ten.’

The late Sir Charles Bright laid many other cables, and his name, like that of the late Sir C. W. Siemens (born 1823, died 1883), is closely identified with several of the early telegraphic enterprises of magnitude.

END OF VOL. I.



NOTE AS TO NEW STEAMERS PROJECTED FOR
THE IRISH MAIL SERVICE.

(Holyhead and Kingstown.)

THE following dimensions give some idea of the size of the new steamers which would be required to perform the mail-packet service between Holyhead and Kingstown in the time contemplated by the conditions of tender issued by the Postmaster-General a few months ago, viz., 3 hours 7 minutes :

Length of treble-screw steamers, 470 feet, as compared with that of the four steamers built under the contract of 1859 (see p. 80, vol. i.), viz., 300 feet. The breadth of the new steamers would be 49 feet, as compared with 35 feet. The gross registered tonnage would be 4,353 tons, as compared with 1,700 tons builders' measurement. As for means of propulsion, the indicated horse-power of the engines, which in the steamers of 1859 was required to be only 600, would, in the enormous craft now projected by the City of Dublin Steam Packet Company, rise to the almost incredible figure of 22,000.

A notable fact in steam navigation appears to be the large increase of tonnage and horse-power needed for a comparatively slight increase in speed. To gain an hour on a voyage across the Irish Channel, it will be seen how vastly greater in both respects would be the projected steamers than those now employed ; while to gain even half an hour, it would require steamers 430 feet long, of upwards of 3,000 tons gross registered tonnage, and engined to the extent of 10,000 indicated horse-power.

Of course, the employment of steamers so large as the energetic and popular company have in view would mean a proportionate increase in the payment for the conveyance of the mails. Under a ten years' contract, it is understood that the company would carry on the